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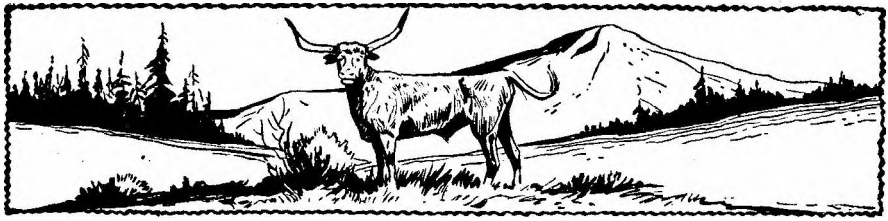
DELL
ZANE GREY'S
WESTERN
MAGAZINE
Zane Grey Novel
THE
VANISHING
AMERICAN
(Magazine Abridgment)
Sherman

"I'll live with you—if only you will not spill blood."

The Vanishing American, Chap. 13



ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

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THIS MONTH'S MAGAZINE ABRIDGMENT: *THE VANISHING AMERICAN*

THIS IS THE STORY *of Nophaie, the Warrior, and of Marian Warner, the white girl who loves him with a love that takes no heed of the barriers of race and convention. They meet and fall in love in the East, but when Nophaie forsakes the glitter of white civilization and returns to his desert home, determined to go back to his old life and help his people, Marian soon follows him. She finds Nophaie greatly changed; white-man education prevents him from placing further credence in tribal superstitions, but the white man's God fails to satisfy his longing for a religion that will fit his simple environment. Confused and drifting, he still does all he can to better the conditions of his fellow tribesmen, victimized and exploited by the whites. Pledging her all to aid Nophaie in this task, Marian soon finds herself entangled in the web of intrigue which pervades reservation affairs. She struggles desperately for Nophaie and his people against the machinations of Morgan, lecherous "missionary," and Blucher, greedy agency superintendent. After an open conflict with these two, Nophaie is forced to take refuge in the canyon fastnesses. Marian offers herself to him, but Nophaie fears that they cannot find lasting happiness together. War comes, and Nophaie recruits a brigade of Indian volunteers, who fight gloriously on the battlefields of Europe. When Nophaie returns, more magnetically appealing than ever, Marian reasserts her great love for him. In a frank scene Nophaie vents upon her the savage passion that she has roused in him, and once more seeks solitude in the desert wastes. At last, finding the answer he has sought so long, Nophaie comes back to Marian, and the final scene of their moving romance is enacted.*

The October issue of ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE will bring its readers a magazine abridgment of

THE THUNDERING HERD

Zane Grey's gripping epic novel of the buffalo hunters and of a boy and girl in love.

Also: **SING, DESERT WIND, a dramatic novelette by L. L. Foreman**

ALMOST A MAN, a tense short story by Thomas Thompson

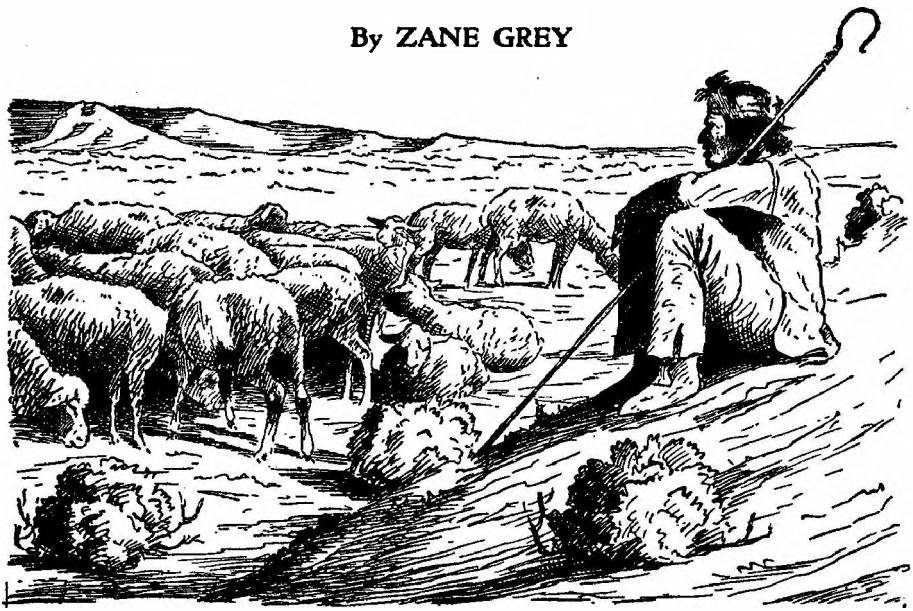
CONQUISTADOR IN HOMESPUN, an article by Harold Preece

And other colorful Old West features too good to miss!

On sale about September 1

THE VANISHING AMERICAN

By ZANE GREY



CHAPTER ONE

Nophaie, the Warrior

AT SUNRISE Nophaie drove his flock of sheep and goats out upon the sage slopes of the desert. The April air was cold and keen, fragrant with the dry tang of the uplands. Taddy and Tinny, his shepherd dogs, had wary eye and warning bark for the careless stragglers of the flock. Gray gaunt forms of wolf and tawny shape of wildcat moved like shadows through the sage.

Nophaie faced the east, where, over a great rugged wall of stone, the sky grew from rose to gold, and a splendor of light seemed about to break upon the world. Nophaie's instinct was to stand a moment, watching and waiting without thought. The door of each hogan of his people opened to the rising sun. They worshiped the sun, the elements, all in nature.

Motionless he stood, an Indian lad of seven years, slim and tall, with his dark face turned to the east, his dark eyes fixed solemnly upon that quarter whence the light and warmth always came. One thin brown hand held a blanket round his shoulders, and the other clasped his bow and arrows.

While he gazed a wondrous change came over the desert. The upstanding gloomy wall of rock far to the fore sud-

denly burned with a line of flame; and from that height down upon the gray lowlands shone the light of the risen sun.

When that blazing circle of liquid gold had cleared the rampart of the desert, too fiery and intense for the gaze of man, Nophaie looked no more, and passed on down the aisles of sage behind his flock. Every day this task was his. For two years he had been the trusted shepherd of his father's sheep.

At five years of age Nophaie had won his first distinction. With other children he was out in charge of the accumulated flocks of the tribe. A sandstorm suddenly swooped down upon the desert, enveloping them in a thick yellow pall. Except Nophaie, all the little shepherds grew frightened and fled back to find their hogans. But Nophaie stayed with the sheep.

They wandered on and on and became lost. Nophaie became lost with them. Three days later Nophaie's father found him, hungry and fearful, but true to his charge. He was praised. He was taught. He was trusted.

Nophaie's shepherding task was lonely and leisurely. He had but to drive the flock from grassy flat to sage slope, slowly on and on, and back again by sunset to the home corral, always alert for the prowling beasts of prey.

That spring the lambs had come early—too early, considering the frosty breath of the dawns. A few lambs had succumbed to the cold. The lambs and kids were all several days old now, fleecy and woolly, grown sturdy enough to gambol in the sage. The dead stillness of the desert dawn was often pierced by the sweet, high-pitched bleat of these lambs and kids.

Nophaie wandered on with them, always watching, listening, feeling. He loved the flock, but did not know that. His task was lonely, but he did not realize it.

The flock leisurely traveled on, a white-dotted moving mass against the background of gray, tearing at the sage, nipping the weeds. Taddy and Tinny trotted to and fro and around, important and morose, Indian dogs that knew their work, and they seldom had to bark a warning. Nophaie leisurely plodded along behind.

Nophaie was no different from other Indian lads, except that the dominant traits of his tribe and his race seemed to be intensified in him. His was the heritage of a chieftain. His mother had died at his birth, whispering strange and mystic prophecies. The old medicine men, the sages of the tribe, had gathered round him during the one illness of his infancy, and had spread their sand-paintings on a flat rock, and had marveled at his quick recovery, predicting for him unknown and great feats. He was named Nophaie, the Warrior.

Through song and story and dance the traditions of his tribe were forever impressed upon his sensitive mind. The valor of Indian braves in war was a memory of the past, but the spirit lived. The boy was taught to understand the nature of a warrior, and to revere his father and the long line of chiefs from which he had descended.

Before Nophaie could walk he had begun to learn the secrets of the life of the open. The love of natural beauty, born in him, had early opportunity for evolution. The habits and ways of all desert creatures became a part of his childhood training. Likewise the

green covering of the earth, in all its beauty and meaning, soon occupied its place of supreme importance in his understanding.

Next in order Nophaie learned the need and thrill and love of the hunt. By his own prowess as a hunter he must some day survive. The tracks and signs and sounds and smells of all denizens of his desert environment became as familiar to him as those of his hogan.

Nophaie wandered on with his sheep, over the sage and sand, under the silent lofty towers of rock. He was unconsciously and unutterably happy because he was in perfect harmony with the reality and spirit of the nature that encompassed him. He had no cares, no needs, no selfishness. Only vaguely had he heard of the menace of the white race encroaching upon the lands of the Indian. Only a few white men had he ever seen.

So Nophaie wandered on with his flock through the sage, content and absorbed, watching, listening, feeling, his mind full of dreams and longings, of song and legend, of the infinite beauty and poetry of his life.

The soft, sweet air he breathed was rich with the whispers of spirits. Above the red wall to the west loomed up a black-and-white dome—a mountain height, pure with snow, fringed by pine—and this was Nothsis Ahn, the home of Utsay, the god of the Indians. He dwelt there with Utsay Asthon, his woman, and together they had made the sun out of fire—they had made all.

The rustling of the sage was a voice; the cool touch of the breeze on his cheek was a kiss of an invisible and kindly spirit, watching over him; the rock he leaned a hand upon left a clinging response, from the soul therein. When a hawk sailed low over Nophaie's head he heard the swish of wings driven by the power he trusted in. The all-enveloping sunlight was the smile of Utsay, satisfied with his people.

So Nophaie wandered on and on over the sage trails, proud and fierce as a young eagle, aloof and strange, dreaming the dreams conjured up by the wise men of his tribe. At seven years of age he had begun to realize the meaning of a chief, and that a chief must some day save his people. What he loved most was to be alone, out in the desert, listening to the real sounds of the open and to the silent whisperings of his soul.

Nophaie did not walk alone. Innumerable spirits kept pace with his light steps. The flash of a swift-winged canyon bird was a message. The gleams of melted frost, sparkling and pure, were the teardrops of his mother, who forever hovered near him, wandered with him along the sage trails, in spirit with his steps. The sun, the moon, the crag with its human face, the black raven croaking his dismal note, the basking rattlesnake, the spider that shut his little door above him, the mockingbird, singer of all songs—these held communion with Nophaie, were his messengers.

Toward sunset Nophaie was far out on the open desert, with many of the monuments and mesas and masses of rimrock between him and the golden purple glory of the west. Homeward bound with his flock, Nophaie had intent eyes for the colorful panorama of sinking sun and transfigured clouds. The sun was going down behind broken masses of soft clouds, creamy and silver where the rays struck, golden in the center of the west, and shading to

purple where the thick, mushrooming, billowy rolls reached to the blue zenith.

While Nophaie gazed in the rapture of his wandering, eager heart there came a moment of marvelous transformation. The sun dipped its lower segment from under a white-rimmed cloud, firing the whole magnificent panorama with blaze of gold and rose and opal. Against the effulgence of the western sky stood up the monuments, silhouetted on that burnished brightness of sunset, black and clear-cut, weird and colossal, motionless and speaking gods of stone.

A warning bark from one of the shepherd dogs drew Nophaie's attention from the sunset. A band of white men had ridden down upon him. Several of them galloped ahead and came round between the Indian lad and his home. The others rode up. They had extra horses, wild and dusty and caked with froth, and pack mules heavily loaded.

"We gotta hev meat," one dark-visaged man called out.

"Wal, we'd better find the squaw who owns this bunch an' buy our meat," suggested another.

"Moze, you know it all," growled another. "Why squaw?"

"Because squaws always own the sheep," replied the other.

"We hevn't time for thet," spoke up the dark-faced one.

"Wal, we don't want Indians trailin' us. I say take time an' buy meat."

"Aw, you'll say next let's eat hoss meat," returned the man called Moze. "Knock the kid on the head, grab some sheep, an' ride on. Thet's me!"

Nophaie could not understand their language, but he sensed peril to himself. Suddenly he darted out between the horses and flashed away through the sage.

"Ketch that kid, somebody!"

One of the riders touched spurs to his horse and, running Nophaie down, reached a strong hand to haul him across in front of the saddle. Nophaie hung there limp.

"Bill," called the leader, "thar ain't no sense in hurtin' the kid. Now you-all wait."

This man was tall, gaunt, gray-haired, and lean, with the eyes of a hawk. "Bill, hang on to the kid. An' some of you drive the sheep ahead of us. Thar's water over hyar somewheres. We'll find it an' make camp."

"Huh!" ejaculated Bill in disgust. "Talkin' about sense, what's the idee, cap, packin' this heavy kid along?"

"Wal, it ain't decent to kill him, jest fer nothin', an' it is sense to keep him from gettin' back home tonight."

"All right, you're the boss. But I'll eat sage if them Indians don't track us, jest the same."

Nophaie hung limp over that horse for several miles before he was tumbled off like an empty sack. The band had come to a halt for the night. Nophaie's hands and feet were bound with a lasso. He heard the bleating of the sheep, and then the trampling low roar of their hoofs as they were driven off into the desert. One of the men gave him food and drink; another covered him with a blanket.

At daylight the band was off, riding hard to the southward, and Nophaie had no choice but to go with them. Toward nightfall of that long day the spirits of the men appeared to rise. They ceased to look back over the rolling ridges of purple sage, or down the leagues of cedar aisles.

Next day some of the band were in favor of letting Nophaie go free. But

again the leader ruled against them.

"Reckon it's tolerable lonely along hyar. We don't want the kid to be lost an' starve."

About noontime one day later they let Nophaie go free, and pointed down a road toward an Indian encampment. Then in a cloud of dust they trotted on. But Nophaie never reached the Indian hogans. Another party of white people, of different look and voice, happened upon him. They were travelers of leisure, seeing the West, riding across the reservation. They had wagons and saddle horses, and Western men to care for them.

Again Nophaie ran, only to be caught by one of the riders and hauled before the women of the party.

"What a handsome Indian lad!" exclaimed one.

"Let us take him along," said another.

An older woman of the group, with something more than curiosity in her face, studied Nophaie for a moment.

"Indian boy, I will take you and put you in a school."

They took Nophaie out of the desert and far to the east. And Nophaie lived and studied in the white man's school and college for eighteen years.

CHAPTER TWO

Call of the Primitive

AS THE train neared the Western town which was her destination, Marian Warner realized that this ride was not a dream, but the first act of the freedom she had yearned for, the first step in her one great adventure. All the excitement and audacity and emotion that had been her undoing now seemed to swell into a thrilling panic.

Long days of travel had passed since she had boarded the train at Philadelphia. The faces of friends, of her aunt—the few who loved her—had grown dim, as if every revolution of the wheels had deadened memory as well as lengthened miles. Little had she guessed how she had cut herself adrift. But to the last she had kept her secret.

Somewhere back along the way, where she had crossed the line into this desert state, she had become conscious of a quickening of her long apathetic feelings. Had her first glimpses of the bleached gray of the desert stirred her heart? Its bigness began to amaze and frighten her. Miles and miles of barrenness—rocks—flats of gray—black mountains in the distance—and again those strange façades of red cliff! Few and far between were the ranches. And the occasional herd of cattle appeared lost in immensity.

Then, as many times during this long ride, she had recourse to the letter that had influenced her to come west.

"OLJATO (Moonlight on the Water),
"Feb. 10, 1916.

"DEAR MARIAN:

"Your letters and gifts were welcome as May flowers. I did not get them at Christmas time because I did not ride into Kaidab. The weather then was cold and I had my only living relative to look after. He was ill. He is better now.

"I rode the ninety-odd miles to the post between sunrise and sunset, over a trail known only to Indians. And all the way I thought of you, of the love for you that only strengthens with distance and time. Remembering your

fondness for horses and how you used to long for wild and lonely places, I wanted you to be with me.

"But in spite of the joy that came with your remembrances, my ride back from the post was full of bitterness. I was again brought into contact with the growing troubles of my tribe, and with the world of white men which I have given up.

"Marian, my people now are very prosperous. The war has brought false values. Wool is fifty cents a pound. Horses and sheep bring higher prices than any Indians ever dreamed of. They think this will last always. They will not save. They live from day to day, and spend their money foolishly. And when the reaction comes they will be suddenly poor, with the trader's prices for food and clothing higher than ever.

"I have been here nearly a year now, and have yet to find one single Indian who is really a Christian. Come out to the reservation and work for a year or two among my people. It could not hurt you. And you might do much for them. You could be a teacher at Mesa or one of the other schools. None would ever know that you came for my sake.

"Your letters heaped upon me terms of reproach. Marian, I have not forgotten one moment of our summer at Cape May. I live over every meeting with you. I love you more than I did then. It seems I am old now. Wisdom came to me here in my desert home, under the shadow of old Nothsis Ahn. I was born under this great mountain. When a boy I was stolen from my home under its red walls. And after eighteen years I have come back. I burned my white man's clothes and books—even the records of my football games—all except your picture. I put on buckskin and corduroy and silver. I seldom speak English and I am again an Indian. No more Lo Blandy, but Nophaie!

"I was young and full of fire that summer at Cape May. I was praised, fêted, sought because I had become a famous athlete—the football and baseball player, winner of so many points against the great colleges. I danced and played the same as white college men.

"Then I met you, Marian. You were different from most of the white girls. I loved you at sight and respected you when I knew you. I called you *Benow di cleash*, the white girl with blue eyes.

"But when I returned to my people the great change came. Not in my love for you, but in my youth. I am a man now, old as these sage hills, and I've learned from them. It was selfish and wrong for me to run after you, to love you, to take your kisses. I am an Indian.

"I see the life of my tribe as a tragedy. The injustice to them is the blackest of white men's baseness. The compulsory school system for the Indian boys and girls has many bad points. The bad missionary is the apostle of hate and corruption. I am an educated Indian—a chief in my tribe. I see their misery. I see them vanishing. I cannot marry an Indian girl, because I love you.

"So Marian, I am here, no longer Lo Blandy, but Nophaie. My name means Warrior. The red sand I tread is part the bones and flesh of my ancestors. I will live my life here and mingle my bones with theirs. I will do all I can for them.

"Come, Marian, to Oljato—come to help me awhile or just to see the wildness and beauty of my home, so that

always afterward your memory will be full of the color and music and grandeur and fragrance of the Indian land.

"NOPHAIE."

Marian put the letter away. She recalled the first time she had ever seen him. It was at Cape May, where a group of college men maintained baseball games with visiting teams, professional and otherwise. Her aunt, with whom she lived, and most of her Philadelphia friends, always spent some weeks at the seashore. And Marian enjoyed games and bathing and dancing as well as anyone. One summer afternoon a friend took her to the athletic field and pointed out the famous Indian star.

Her eyes fell upon a tall bareheaded athlete, slenderly yet powerfully built, his supple form broadening wide at the shoulders. His face was dark, his hair black as coal. Striking and handsome as he was, it was not his appearance alone that thrilled her so. In action the Indian was simply beautiful. He played an outfield position, and the chances of the game fell so that he had little to do except run. How easily he moved—what a stride he had!

Toward the end of the game, at a critical time for the home team, he hit a ball far beyond the reach of the opposing fielders. The crowd roared its delight. The Indian dashed down toward first base, and, turning, appeared to gather speed as he ran. He ran as the Greek runners must have run, garlanded for their victories. How fleet! Then he was making the turn for home base, and the crowd was yelling wildly. He seemed to be facing Marian as he sped on, magnificent in his action. He beat the throw and scored his home run, a feat the audience applauded with prodigious abandon.

That night at a dance one of Marian's friends had asked her. "Have you met Lo?"

"Lo! and who's he or she?" queried Marian.

"He's the crack Indian athlete. You saw him play today. Lo Blandy."

And so it came about presently that Marian found herself facing the Indian athlete she had admired. Not just then had she realized it, but the truth was she had fallen in love with him at first sight. Something in her nature, never dreamed of before, went out to the Indian. He had a fine face, dark and strong, with eyes of piercing blackness.

"Will you dance with me?" he had asked, and appeared as much at his ease as any of the college men.

Marian found herself dancing with an Indian—a very strange and momentous circumstance, it seemed. Marian enjoyed that dance.

They met again by accident on the beach, and because no one else came and they were interesting to each other, they talked for long. After that day Marian went to all the baseball games. And Lo Blandy became one of her numerous admirers, to the amusement of her aunt and friends.

But these meetings had been deadly earnest for Marian. She loved the Indian. She fought against herself—then surrendered and fought no more. He had more principle and better habits than any white boy she knew.

Marian had not been ashamed of her love for Lo Blandy. She felt that she might reach a point where she would glory in it. But she had shrunk from making confidants of her aunt and her friends. No one guessed the truth of that summer at Cape May. And now

she was on a train, far out in the West, soon to take whatever means offered to reach the Indian reservation.

"I have no close family ties," she said to herself in sincere defense. "I am twenty-three. I am my own master. I've always dreamed of love with honor—of marriage with children. Perhaps in vain! My aunt, my friends, would call me mad. They do not understand me. I am not throwing my life away. I can do good out here. I can help *him*. I have some money, and that I will gladly use now. Let the future take care of itself."

So she settled the matter of perplexity and of conscience, and gave up to the singular appeal of the prospect before her. Here indeed was the bright face of adventure, mysterious and alluring, coupled with a work she might make uplifting and all-satisfying.

Flagerstown, the first Western town Marian had ever been in, was not at all like what she had imagined it would be. It was a thriving little city, bustling with motorcars and active over its lumber, railroad, and cattle interests. It bore no signs of the typical frontier town. What surprised Marian a little was the fact that neither hotel proprietor nor banker, post-office official nor clerk in the store, nor a cattleman she chanced to address showed any curiosity concerning her. When she made inquiry about the Indian reservation they were courteous and kindly, yet somehow aloof.

She ascertained that a mail carrier left Flagerstown twice a week for the places on the reservation—Mesa, Red Sandy, and Kaidab. And the post-office man was kind enough to engage passage for her. Next morning the hotel porter called to take her baggage. Marian saw a dilapidated Ford car that appeared to be wired and roped together. It was loaded heavily with mailbags, boxes, and sacks. There was a coop containing some chickens going by parcel post. Next to the driver's seat had been left a small space, evidently for Marian.

Then appeared a young man in ragged dark suit. His small feet were incased in brown buckskin moccasins with silver buttons. His dark face appeared to be half hidden by a black sombrero. She could see that he was young. He got into the driver's seat and looked up at her. He was only a youth, his face keen, smooth, dark as bronze. He had a level brow and eyes black as night. Suddenly they gleamed with intelligence and humor.

"You ready go?" he queried.

"Y-yes, I guess so," faltered Marian. Dare she trust this frightful junk heap of a car and its Indian driver on a long desert journey?

"You go Kaidab?" asked the driver.

"Yes," replied Marian.

"I get you there—five o'clock," he returned with a smile.

"Will it be cold?" she asked, as she was about to climb into the car.

"You need blanket for while," he said.

Marian had no blanket, but she had brought a heavy coat which would serve as well. This she put on. Then she squeezed into the small space beside the driver.

The Indian moved something that made the rickety car crack like a pistol and lurch forward. Marian could not stifle a gasp. The square-fronted build-

ings with their queer high board signs began to speed back out of her sight. Ahead the white asphalt road merged into one of dark earth, and there appeared a long slope of pine trees. Cold, keen, biting wind fanned Marian's cheeks. It nipped with its frosty breath. The car passed the line of buildings, and to the left loomed a mighty green-and-white mountain mass that hid its summit in gloomy rolling clouds.

"Storm," said the Indian. "We hurry so get 'way from snow."

She snuggled down into the warm coat and peeped out at the wonderful green slope of forest. Above all Marian's misgivings and defiance there pealed a subtle voice of joy.

CHAPTER THREE

Desert Land

THE road upon which the Indian was driving led out into a pine forest, between the stately trees of which she caught glimpses of cloud-enshrouded mountains.

Marian breathed deeply of the keen air And the strong pitchy smell of pine began to stimulate her.

"What mountains?" she asked.

"Spanish Peaks," replied the driver.

The road led through a forest of pines such as Marian had never seen, wonderfully fragrant and exhilarating. Ten miles of forest the car traversed, then an open valley, fine ranch country Marian judged, from which view of the mountain range was magnificent, and then it entered forest again. The car chugged uphill.

From a ridge top Marian's eyes were greeted by a strange and desolate spectacle—a wide black valley, a slope of black cinders, and a stream of red lava crusted and jagged, and beyond these foothills of black cinders smooth and steep, all waved and ridged like sand dunes carved by wind. A range of these foothills rose off toward the south, growing higher and smoother, weird and sinister monuments to the havoc of volcanic action in the ages past. Beyond and above this range towered a high mountain of cinders, strangely barren, marvelously colored in purple, black, and red.

Marian saw so much in this scored and devastated region that she regretted passing on so rapidly. Soon her Indian guide reached a downgrade in the forest, and here Marian feared every flying mile would be her last.

By and by the pines began to decrease in size and grow farther apart, so that glimpses of open country came to Marian. Then from round a rocky ridge quite abruptly the car sped out into thin forest from which stretched a vast waste of gray.

She was looking down over many leagues of desert. The pines failed, the cedars began, and beyond them rolled and waved away the white billowy miles of wasteland. The desert sloped away league after league and rolled upward majestically doubling leagues, all open to the eye.

Marian feasted her eyes, trying to grasp what it was that she saw. Moments and miles passed, and suddenly a gray squall of rain and snow swooped down from behind, enveloping the car. It brought a piercing cold. Her cheeks, her nose, her ears seemed to congeal to ice. The world around that car was white; the sky was obscured. When Marian opened her eyes, at in-

tervals, she could not see far in front of the car.

At length the gray cloud lightened, the snow thinned out, and the blue of sky shone through a thin haze of white. That too faded or melted away, and then the storm veered, leaving clear a great open space above. Once again the car sped out upon a height from which Marian had a second look at the leagues of desert. Here the immense reach and slope struck her more forcibly, and especially the great volume of light.

The sun came out from behind the cloud bank over the east, and the desert magnified lines and colors, and suddenly unmasked an appalling beauty.

They traveled downhill for no less than three hours. This brought them to an iron bridge spanning a rock-walled gorge, through which ran a muddy stream. Here in this valley the sun was hot. Marian had to remove the heavy coat.

Beyond the river stretched a gravelly plain, hard-packed by wind, and its slow ascent at last gained another height. Three level benches of colored [illegible] as high as mountains, lifted [illegible]eir wondrous reds and purples and [illegible]ys and golds toward the blue sky. [illegible] was a land of painted steps. Marian felt confounded in her own impressions. Once she glanced behind her. The spectacle to the rear was vastly different, a gray desert slope, a red desert slope, league on league, shelving back to rise and lift to a great dark plateau from which the Spanish Peaks showed white pure snow against the sky.

The ensuing hour, during which the Indian driver crossed the bare plains of sand and gravel and climbed the successive steps of colored rock, passed by all too quickly for Marian. Above the last desert step the earth appeared a place of ruin and decay, a zone of sinister red and strange drab, where rocks and clay had been weathered into fantastic shapes. Marian likened the region to an inferno.

Soon it lay behind, and she found herself confronted with a wide valley between glaring walls of rock. Dark rich green fields of alfalfa formed the floor of this valley, making the hot walls of stone naked and stark by contrast. Marian saw clusters of trees beginning to show green, and the roofs of two flat houses.

"What's this place?" she inquired.

"Copenwashie," replied the Indian.

"Are those green fields Indian farms?"

"Some are. White [illegible]eople got most land now."

"But isn't this a reservation for the use of Indians?" went on Marian curiously.

All the reply she received was a grunt of disgust. The Indian drove fast up this level valley, making the dust fly from under his car. When he came to the first house he stopped and carried packages in. Marian saw no one.

Upon resuming the journey her guide pointed out some low stone houses, standing back under shelving cliffs, surrounded by greening trees. These were the homes of missionaries. From that point the road ascended the side of a steep gorge. Up on top of this elevation the land was level, covered with rough low bushes, dull green in color. Gray and red buildings showed in the distance, and long lines of bare trees. In a few moments the car had reached them.

"Mesa. We stop little while," said the driver, coming to a halt before one of

the stone structures. "This trading-post. People friendly. You go in. I take mail."

Marian got out, glad to stretch her limbs again, and strolled to and fro. She saw a wide tree-lined avenue, with well-built gray stone houses on one side, and large red stone buildings on the other. These latter she took to be the government school quarters.

Then her attention was attracted toward the trading-post. Three men, Indians, had just come out. They wore white man's garb, even to shoes and hats. Marian suffered something of disillusion and disappointment at sight of them. Then a white man appeared, tall, sandy-haired, and open-faced.

"Come in. I'm Paxton, the trader," he said. "My wife is always glad to meet visitors. You must be tired and hungry. And it's a good way to Kaidab."

"Thank you, I am hungry, but not tired," replied Marian, as she followed him in, wondering how he had learned where she was going.

He led her through a huge hall-like storeroom, in which counters and shelves were loaded with merchandise, to another part of the house, into a living-room, comfortable and pleasant. There Marian met the trader's wife, a young and comely woman who was most kindly and agreeable. Marian liked her.

"I'm on my way to Kaidab," she volunteered.

"Well, I'm glad of that. It's fine of you to be interested. God knows the Indians need friends."

Marian asked questions about the Indians, and altogether spent a pleasant half hour with Mrs. Paxton.

"I hope you come to Mesa again," said her hostess, as they passed out through the store. From the door Marian saw a white man standing beside the car, in conversation with the Indian driver.

"There's Friel," said Mrs. Paxton.

"Who's Friel?" queried Marian.

"He's a missionary," she replied, "but of the kind that I'm afraid does more to antagonize the Indians against the church than to instill the true spirit of Christianity."

Marian was somewhat startled. "Thank you for your kindness," she said. "I'm sure we'll meet again. Good-by."

She walked out to the car. At her step Friel turned to see her.

"I'm Mr. Friel," he said, touching his sombrero. "Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you," replied Marian.

"You're traveling alone," he said. "May I know your errand?"

Marian told him what she had told the trader's wife.

"Have you permission to go on the reservation?" he inquired.

"No. Is it—compulsory?"

"I—well—no, hardly that. But it is always best for visitors to see Mr. Blucher."

"Who is he?"

"The agent in charge of the reservation."

"Very well. Where can I find him?"

"Unfortunately Mr. Blucher is away attending an investigation. But I can take it upon myself to—to make everything all right. Wouldn't you like to see the school?"

"It would be interesting to see the Indian children. I may return here and find some kind of work with them. But I've no time now."

"I can get you a position here," he said eagerly.

"What authority have you?"

"Well, no outright authority to hire government employees," he returned. "But I hire people to work for me occasionally. And I'm hand in glove with Morgan. He's the power here."

"Morgan?"

"He's been here over twenty years. And he runs things."

"What is he?"

"Missionary."

"So—and if I return here to find work—whom should I see first?"

"Come to me on the quiet. Then we'll see Morgan. If you got a job before seeing him you'd soon lose it."

"Indeed! Well, I'll think it over," returned Marian, as she stepped to the car.

Friel took hold of her arm, not to assist her, but to keep her from entering.

"Let me drive you to Kaidab. I have my car here. There's no room in this filthy junk box. Besides, a handsome girl like you oughtn't be riding alone with one of these Indians."

"Why not? He's the mail carrier. I'm paying him for driving me."

"They're all alike, these Indian louts. You're not safe with any one of them."

"If that's true, Mr. Friel, it doesn't speak well for your missionary work. I'll take a chance on this Indian. Good day."

With that Marian resumed her seat in the car and signed the driver to start. He did so after a fashion that indicated he was glad to leave the vicinity. Marian sat back, just as ready as she imagined he was. Upon sober reflection, she discerned that she resented most the insult to the Indian.

The gray clouds soon obscured the sun, and Marian again felt the chill of the wind. She bundled up once more. Yet she gazed from one side to the other, eager to see. Eastward were long ragged lines of blue earth or rock, evidently marking a canyon. To the west the only mark of note was a great white bluff, standing alone, flat-topped, with bare sloping sides. Soon the gray obscurity ahead turned out to be snow, a driving hard storm that put Marian to another test. When the storm cleared away and the sun shone again they had reached a wide red basin, sand-sloped and walled in by low cliffs, now shining with wet faces.

At two o'clock the Indian brought his car to a halt before Red Sandy, a fortlike trading-post located high upon an immense slope of sand. The traders, two young men, were as solicitous and kind as had been the Paxtons. They conducted Marian to a loft above their store. It was warm, and somehow peculiarly fitting and picturesque with its blankets and baskets and other Indian handiwork.

From the window of this house Marian had a wonderful view that fascinated and repelled her. How desolate and dreary! Following the horizon round toward the west she suddenly beheld a dim purple-and-white dome. For long it held her gaze, not alone because of its beauty. It called. It did not seem real, so deep was the purple, so ethereal the white.

"Is that a mountain?" she asked one of the traders.

"It shore is," he replied. "That's old Nothis Ahn. It's worshiped by the Indians."

Marian went back to the car, where the Indian sat waiting for her. On the way down across the sandy basin Marian espied dark riders approaching from around the bluff. She watched them grow until they met and passed her, two Indian men and one woman,

riding shaggy ponies and packing blankets and sheepskins behind their saddles.

Then there ensued an hour in which the car chugged over a sandy road, mostly uphill. Presently the driver called Marian's attention to a mound of earth with a dark hole leading into it. "Hogan. Indian house," he said. How crude and primitive!

It was only from the high places, Marian came to learn, that the incredible openness and boundlessness of the desert could be grasped. And there came a ridge summit from which she could see afar, down and across a land of prairie, on to slowly rising bare waste that swept upward to purple and black heights.

In another hour she learned that the black heights were forests of cedar and the purple ones were meadows of sage.

If this long twenty mile upgrade of desert had not slowly grown from waste to verdure, from desolate, sinister badlands to noble heights of keen sweet air and beautiful color, Marian would not have been prepared for the next phase of this bewildering country.

The Indian driver sped his car down a steep break, round curve and corner, out of the forest into a changed world of stone. The road stretched on through a long narrow pass, above which towered cliffs of red and gold and yellow, so lofty that she had to look almost straight up to see their rims. Marian gazed upward until her eyes ached.

All too swiftly ran the car and all too short was that pass. It opened out upon ridged gray desert, with the black mesa on the right zigzagging away to the eastward and the red corrugated wall of stone on the left notching its bold sky line away to the north.

Ten more miles of travel removed both ramparts far to either side. And another hilltop gave Marian her first sight of Kaidab. All she saw was several low flat stone houses. A crude and dreary habitation! Yet no splendid spectacle of the whole long ride had given Marian the thrill that now shot over her.

Chapter Four

The Trader's Wife

CLOSE at hand, Kaidab trading-post showed striking aspects of life and activity. First there were a number of the shaggy Indian ponies, unhaltered, standing with uplifted heads, and black rolling eyes on the mail carrier's car. Several were without saddles, having blankets tied on their backs.

Huge bags of burlap containing wool were being packed into a wagon by Indian freighters. Before the open front of one building, evidently a storehouse, other Indians were packing wool in long sacks, a laborsome task, to judge from their efforts to hold the sack erect and stamp down the wool. The whole interior of this open house appeared hung and littered with harness, rope, piles of white sacks, piles of wool and skins. The odor of sheep struck Marian rather disagreeably. Flies buzzed everywhere.

White men in shirt sleeves, with sweaty faces and hands begrimed, were working over a motor car as dilapidated as the mail carrier's. Two Indian women, laden with bundles, came out of the open door of the trading-post.

Then an Indian came riding up to dismount near Marian. He was old, his lean face a mass of wrinkles, and there was iron gray in his hair. He wore a thin cotton shirt and overalls—white man's apparel much the worse for wear. Behind his saddle hung a long bundle, a goatskin rolled with the fur inside. This he untied and carried into the trading-post.

A sturdily built, keen-eyed man stalked out of the post, with a hand on the Indian mail carrier's shoulder. He wore a vest over a flannel shirt, but no coat or hat.

"Take her bags in," he said to the Indian.

Then, at his near approach, Marian felt herself scanned by a gaze at once piercing and kindly.

"Glad to welcome you, Miss Warner," he said. "Been expecting you for two hours. I'm John Withers."

Marian offered her hand. "Expecting me?" she queried curiously.

"News travels fast in this country," he replied with a smile. "An Indian rode in two hours ago with the news you were coming."

"But my name?" asked Marian, still curious.

"Mrs. Withers told me that and what you looked like. She'll shore be glad to see you. Come, we'll go in."

Marian followed him into the yard beside the trading-post, where somewhat in the background stood a low, squat, picturesque stone house with roof of red earth. Withers ushered her into a wonderful room that seemed to flash Indian color and design at her. Blankets on floor and couch, baskets on mantel and wall, and a strange painted frieze of Indian figures, crude, elemental, striking—these lent the room its atmosphere. A bright fire blazed in the open stone fireplace. Books and comforts were not lacking.

Marian's quick eyes had only time for one look when a woman of slight stature and remarkable face entered.

"Welcome to Kaidab, Miss Warner," she said warmly, with extended hands. "We're happy to meet you. We hope you will stay long."

"Thank you, Mrs. Withers. You're very kind. I—I am very glad to get here," replied Marian.

"You've had a long, cold ride. I took it first twenty-five years ago, on horseback."

"Yes, it was hard. And cold—I nearly froze. But, oh, it was wonderful!"

"John, put Miss Warner's bags in the second room. And send some hot water. After she's comfortable and rested we can talk."

Marian found the room quaint and strange as the others. While washing and changing her dusty clothes she pondered over her impressions of Mrs. Withers. For some reason she felt drawn to this woman. She divined news, strange portents, unknown possibilities, all of which hurried her back to the living-room. Mrs. Withers was there, waiting for her.

"How sweet and fair you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Withers, with an admiring glance at Marian's face. "We don't see your kind out here. The desert is hard on blondes."

"So I imagine," replied Marian. "I'll not long remain 'Benow di cleash!'—is that pronounced correctly?"

Mrs. Withers laughed. "Well, I understand you. But you must say it this way—'Benow di cleash!' "

Her voice had a strange, low, liquid quality.

"Mrs. Withers, you know where I got that name," asserted Marian.

"Yes, I'm happy to tell you I do. Let us sit down." Mrs. Withers led the way to the couch. "First, I want to tell you two things—that I know will make us friends."

"I hope so—believe so," returned Marian, trying to hold her calm.

"Listen. All my life I've been among the Indians," said Mrs. Withers in her low voice. "These Indians here have come to care for me. They have given me a name. They believe me—trust me. They call on me to settle disputes, to divide property left by their dead, to tell their troubles. I have learned their dreams, their religion, their prayers and legends and poetry, their medicine, the meaning of their dances. And the more I learn of them the more I love and respect them."

Mrs. Withers paused a moment, her eloquent eyes riveted upon Marian.

"For a good many years this remote part of the Indian country was far out of the way of white men. Thus the demoralization and degradation of the Indian were retarded, so far as this particular tribe is concerned. This Nopah tribe is the proudest, most intelligent, most numerous, and the wealthiest tribe left in the United States. So-called civilization has not yet reached Kaidab. But it is coming. I feel the next few years will go hard with the Indian—perhaps decide his fate."

"Oh—there seems no hope!" murmured Marian.

"There indeed seems none, but I look at this question as the Indian looks at everything. He begins his prayer, 'Let all be well with me,' and he ends it, 'Now all is well with me.' I want you to let me help you to understand the Indian—for sake of your happiness!"

Marian could not voice her surprise. A tremor ran over her.

"Nophaie showed me your picture—told me about you," went on Mrs. Withers with an exquisite softness of voice. "Ah! do not be shocked. It was well for him that he confided in me. I met him the day he returned from the East. I remembered him. I knew him as a boy. But Nophaie did not remember me. He went out to the sage slopes of Nothsis Ahn, and when he rode back he had not his white man's clothes, or speech, or name. He was Nophaie. And he rode here now and then. The Indians told me about him. He is a chief who wants to help them in a white man's way. But the Indians want him to be a medicine man. Well, I saw his trouble, and when he came here I talked. I helped him with his own language. It returned but slowly. I saw his unhappiness. And in the end he told me about you—showed me your picture—confessed his love."

Marian covered her burning face with trembling hands.

"Marian, do not be ashamed of Nophaie's love," went on Mrs. Withers appealingly. "No one else knows. John suspects, but is not sure. I understand you—feel with you—and I know more. You'd not be here if you did not love Nophaie!"

"Of—course I love—him," said Marian unsteadily, as she uncovered her face. "You misunderstand. I'm not ashamed. It's just the shock of hearing—knowing—the suddenness of your disclosure."

Gathering courage, and moved by an

intense and perfect assurance of sympathy, Marian briefly told Mrs. Withers of her romance with Nophaie, and then of her condition in life and her resolve to have her fling at freedom, to live a while in the West and in helping the Indians perhaps find something of happiness.

"Ah! You will grieve, but you will also be wonderfully happy," replied Mrs. Withers. "As for Nophaie—you will save him. His heart was breaking. He had a remarkable career in college. But what good Nophaie's education and prowess will do out here is a question. He must learn to be an Indian. Eighteen years away made him more white than red. He will never go back to the white man's life. Marian, I wonder—does that worry you? Be honest with me?"

"I—I love him terribly."

"And will you marry Nophaie?"

Marian uttered a little gasp.

"Nophaie is an Indian," Mrs. Withers went on. "But I never saw a finer man—white or red. I think you're a fortunate girl. To love and be loved—to live in this desert—to see its wildness and grandeur—to learn of it from an *Indian*—to devote your energies to a noble cause! I hope you see the truth!"

"I don't see very clearly, but I believe you," replied Marian. "I ought not forget to tell you—Nophaie never asked me to—to marry him."

"Well, it wasn't because he didn't want to, believe me," returned the older woman. "What do you think you'll do—send for him or ride out to his home?"

"I—I'd rather meet him out—away—somewhere in the desert," replied Marian. "But would that be—be all right?"

"Certainly it'll be all right. John will take you to meet Nophaie," rejoined Mrs. Withers warmly. "And no one, except John and me, will be in the secret. We'll tell the men and everyone who happens along that you've come out to work among the Indians."

At that juncture Withers came tramping into the room.

"Well, Miss, a Pahute Indian just rode in. He saw Nophaie this morning and talked with him. I thought you'd be glad to hear that."

"Oh—today! What did he tell you?" queried Marian eagerly.

"Not much, I just asked if he'd seen Nophaie. He said he had, at sunup this morning. Nophaie was with the sheep. It's lambing time out there."

"May I take a look at this Pahute?"

"Come on," replied Withers.

"Yes, go out with him," interposed Mrs. Withers. "I must see about dinner."

"Miss Warner," said Withers seriously. "This Pahute is a bad Indian. He's got a record, I'm sorry to say. He's killed white men and Indians both."

Withers led Marian through the back of the gray stone house into the store. The center of this large room was a stone-floored square, walled off from the spacious and crowded shelves by high counters. Indians were leaning against these counters, all with their backs turned to Marian, making purchases of the white man behind the counter. Piles of Indian blankets covered the ends of the counters. Back of them on the shelves were a variety of colored dry goods and canned foods and boxes and jars. From the ceiling hung saddles, bridles, lanterns, lassos—a numberless assortment of articles salable to Indians.

"Here's your Pahute," said Withers, pointing from the doorway out into the open. "Not very pretty, is he?"

Marian peeped out from behind the trader to see a villainous-looking little Indian, black almost, round-faced, big-nosed, with the boldest, hardest look she had ever seen on a human being's face. His garb consisted of a soiled velvet or corduroy shirt, and trousers of blue jeans. His silver-dotted belt held a heavy gun.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Withers, smiling.

"I'm not especially taken with him," replied Marian with a grimace. "I prefer to see him at a distance. But he looks—like—"

"Like the real thing. You bet he is. But to give the devil his due, this Pahute hasn't done a mean or vicious thing since Nophaie came back. The Indians tell me Nophaie has talked good medicine to him."

"Then Nophaie has begun to help his people?"

"He shore has."

"I am very glad," said Marian softly. "I remember he always believed he could not do any good."

"We're glad, too. You see, Miss Warner, though we live off the Indians, we're honestly working for them."

"The trader at Mesa said much the same, and that traders were the only friends the Indians had. Is it true?"

"We believe so. But I've known some missionaries who were honest-to-God men—who benefited the Indians."

"Don't they *all* work for the welfare of the Indians?"

"Unfortunately they do not," he replied bluntly. "Morgan and Friel are bad medicine. The harm they do, in many cases, is counteracted by the efforts of missionaries who work sincerely for the good of the Indian. As a matter of fact some of the missionaries don't last long out here, unless they give in to Morgan's domination."

"Why, that seems strange!" said Marian wonderingly. "Has this Morgan power to interfere with really good missionaries?"

"Has he?" replied Withers. "I reckon. He tries to get rid of missionaries he can't rule, or, for that matter, *anybody*."

"How in the world can he do that?"

"Nobody knows, really. But we who have been long on the reservation have our ideas. Shore he stands ace-high with the mission board in the East. The *facts* never get to this mission board. That must be the cause of Morgan's power. Some day the scales will fall from their eyes and they'll dismiss him."

"How very different—this missionary work—from what we read and hear!"

"I reckon it is," said Withers. "Take, for instance, the case of young Ramsdell, the cowboy missionary. Ramsdell's way of work ruffled Morgan. This cowboy preacher first got the Indians to like and trust him. Morgan and his ally feared Ramsdell was getting influence. Well, Morgan called one of his investigations, his tribunals. He and Friel and the agent Blucher constituted themselves the mission board out here. They brought Ramsdell to their court and accused him of being a leader in heathenism. This charge was based on the fact that he dressed in Indian costume for the entertainment of Indian children. Another charge was that he was too friendly with us traders to be a true missionary. He was dismissed. So rolls on the Christian Juggernaut!"

Withers seemed suddenly conscious of the profound shock his statements had given Marian. Then, just as earnestly, though not so forcefully, he

talked further. He explained that many of the missionaries sent out there had been misfits in other walks of life. They were really less to blame for evil consequences than the combination of forces that had sent them out there to the bleak, wild desert. Withers blamed the system that ignorantly and arbitrarily sent inferior men to attempt to teach Christianity to Indians.

"Miss Warner, do you want me to send a message or letter to Nophaie by this Pahute?" inquired Withers.

"No. I'd rather go myself," replied Marian. "Mrs. Withers said you'd take me. Will you be so kind?"

"I shore'll take you," he rejoined. "I've got some sheep out that way, and other interests. It's a long ride for a tenderfoot. How are you on a horse?"

"I've ridden some, and this last month I went to a riding school three times a week. I'm pretty well hardened."

"It's well you broke in a little before coming West. Because these Nopah trails are rough riding, and you'll have all you can stand. When would you like to start?"

"Just as soon as you can."

"Day after tomorrow, then."

Chapter Five

Valley of Gods

IN ANOTHER and even more important council with Mrs. Withers that evening, the matter of Marian's work was discussed. They agreed that a beginning should be made at Mesa, in whatever connection might be available at the Indian school. It was decided that in case Marian's overtures there were futile she could come back to Kaidab and go about her work among the Indians on her own initiative. Nophaie's possible wishes and suggestions were taken into consideration.

On the second morning Marian arose at five o'clock. Her heart swelled and beat high. She donned her rough warm outdoor garb—blouse of flannel, riding-trousers and boots. She had coat and sweater and heavy gloves to go with them. Other necessities she packed in a small duffle bag.

When she got outdoors the sun had risen and appeared to be losing its brightness. A gray haze of cloud overspread the sky. The wind was cold, gusty, and whipped at Marian's hair. Indians were riding in to the post, and already the work of the day was under way. Withers, bareheaded and coatless as usual, was directing the packing of two mules. Presently he espied her.

"Say, Johnny, will you run in the house and ask for Miss Warner," he said, quite seriously.

Marian was nonplused. "But—Mr. Withers. I—I am Miss Warner," she said, almost involuntarily. She did not quite trust him.

A twinkle shone in his eye. "Shore I thought you were a boy," he said. "Was wondering where *such* a boy might come from. You shore look good medicine to me."

His frank admiration was pleasing to Marian. She had a moment of happiness in the thought that perhaps Nophaie, too, would find her attractive in this riding-suit.

Two Indians drove the pack mules ahead of Marian. Withers had instructed her to mount and ride after them.

He would presently follow. To her disappointment, she had been given a horse instead of one of the shaggy Indian mustangs—a short, stocky horse not at all spirited and quite ugly. But when she had gotten astride him, she felt as if she were riding in a rocking chair that moved on a level, if such a thing were possible. The motion delighted her.

One of the Indians was old, judging from his gray hair and sloping shoulders. The other was a handsome boy of sixteen years, perhaps, and sight of him was pleasing to Marian.

She felt the cold puff of wind, she smelled the dust, she rode easily without any strain whatever. Then the mustangs and mules ahead suddenly went out of sight. The trail had led down over a steep bank. Presently Marian reached it. She was amazed to see a deep red gash in the earth, with crumbling walls, and a muddy, noisy stream. Mules and mustangs were edging foot by foot down a declivity right at the edge of the water. The Indians rode fast into the stream, making mud and water fly. They yelled at the mules. Marian felt her skin begin to prickle. This horse of hers manifestly had no more regard for perpendicular places than for levels. He went right down! Marian had no easy time holding on. She heard a noise behind her.

"That's quicksand," called Withers from above. "Safe, but you need to hurry Buckskin."

Marian had no time even to make up her mind. Buckskin piled off the bank and floundered into the quicksand. Marian had her first fright. But he kept moving. He did not let two hoofs sink at once. And once well started, he crossed that muddy stream at a sharp gait, and climbed a sandy steep trail to the top of the bank. There Marian regained some semblance of her composure before Withers reached her side.

"How do you like Buckskin?"

"I—I guess I like him a lot," she replied.

"Shore thought you would. He's a pacer."

Withers rode ahead to the pack mules and quickened their pace. The Indians jogged on in the lead. Ahead bare hills of yellow stone loomed up high toward the overcast sky.

The trail led into a defile through the hills of rock. Slanting surfaces rose on both sides and gradually lifted to imposing heights. In pockets and niches grew stunted cedar trees, with roots growing out of the solid rock.

Buckskin held to a pace that kept him within sight of the horses ahead. On rocky places of the trail he appeared as surefooted as in the sand. Slowly the slopes closed in, grew higher, and the trail led uphill. Perhaps half an hour of a gradual climb brought Marian out on top of a ridge from which she soon saw into the distance. How splendid a scene greeted her! Withers had waited for her, evidently anticipating her delight.

"Thought you'd like this ten-mile strip," he said. "The big black rock standing out of the plain is called 'the Captain.' And the Indians call that sharp monument you see 'Slim Rock That Stands High.' It's twice as high as your Washington soldier monument."

Long and green and broad appeared the level hollow of desert that led to these upstanding figures, lonely and sentinel-like in the distance. In another hour Marian rode between them, to gaze up in awe, to marvel at the

black granite grandeur of "the Captain" and the red sandstone splendor of "Slim Rock That Stands High."

Toward mid-afternoon, what Withers had feared came to pass. "Sandstorm," he said. "But not bad. It won't last long. Get on your glasses, and cover your mouth and nose with your scarf."

A pall of yellow swooped down out of the west. The wonderful landmarks ahead were blotted out. The sweep of this desert storm seemed fierce and swift, swallowing up the monuments and the plains, and moving down upon Marian with a majestic and inevitable precision. Then it enveloped her.

Marian imagined she grew suddenly blind. And she began to choke. She had to breathe through the scarf. There was not enough air. Her lungs lifted and heaved. The smell of dust seemed as stifling as the substance of it. She felt the fine, thin, stinging particles on face and neck. And when that heavy front of the storm passed by Marian emerged just in time to escape acute distress. Riding was disagreeable still, but gradually the gusts of whirling dust lessened, until the storm blew away toward the eastward, enveloping the uplands there as it had in the west. The sun came out, warming Marian's cold hands and face and lighting the desert. Soon there came the best hour of that day, close to sunset, warmer and without wind.

"We're getting somewhere," Withers remarked. "I didn't tell you before. This is the sage flat where Nophaie used to shepherd his sheep. Here he was stolen. Way over there—that great break in the red wall—is the pass into the Valley of Gods. Nophaie was born there."

Withers rode on. Marian stared after him and then down at the gray sage. She reined in her horse, dismounted, and gathering a bit of the fragrant sage, she placed it in the pocket of her blouse, and meant to treasure it always. Then with a hand on her horse she gazed away across the plain toward the uplands where Nophaie had been born. Valley of Gods!

Marian mounted and did not look back. Her heart was full. The trail, winding through the sage, led her under the shadow of the ponderous red mesa. Upon a grassy bench Withers had made camp. Already a fire was burning. The horses were rolling. The Indians were unpacking the mules.

"Get down and come in," said Withers cheerily. "Find a seat and rest yourself. We'll soon have supper."

Marian became conscious of aching bones and tired muscles. She was glad to rest. Withers did not appear to be in a hurry, yet results multiplied magically, and all in a few minutes, apparently, there was supper steaming fragrantly, and a little tent stretched over a roll of blankets for her bed.

"Come and get it," presently spoke up Withers, in his hearty voice.

Next moment Marian was sitting cross-legged before a strip of canvas upon which Withers spread the repast. The odor that assailed her suddenly awakened a ravishing hunger. And Marian began her first meal out on the desert, with an appreciation and relish never before experienced in her life.

"Shore there's nothing wrong with your appetite," remarked Withers.

"I'm ashamed of myself, Mr. Withers," replied Marian. "But my excuse is that I never was so hungry nor did I taste such good things to eat."

The trader evidently enjoyed Marian's hearty appetite and her praise. Later, too, when she insisted upon do-

ing some little share of the after-supper tasks, he seemed amused. Marian began to associate the simplicity of this Westerner with the bold ruggedness of force that characterized him.

Marian found she needed her heavy coat, but in lieu of that she wrapped a blanket round her and strolled away from the camp for a while. The afterglow of sunset came out on the distant walls, as if for her especial benefit. How delicate and exquisite the softness of rose and gold! They faded while she watched. Twilight seemed to last long, but at length night fell. She turned toward the flare of light and the red blaze which marked camp.

Marian crawled into the little tent, that was so low it touched her head as she sat upon her bed, and, making a pillow of sweater and coat, she wearily unlaced her boots and slipped gratefully down under the heavy woolen blankets.

In the morning Withers called her, and when she crawled out of the little tent it was into a wonderful gray of dawn, cold and pure, stingingly sweet with its perfume of desert, with the great mesa standing clear and sharp and black against the eastern gold of sky.

An hour after starting, Marian was utterly at a loss to see how they could ever surmount the tremendous red wall toward which they were riding. It looked the scarred, blunt face of a mountain. But what she saw at a distance was vastly different at close range.

Marks that had appeared to be scars turned out to be ledges and lines of broken cleavage and slopes of talus and masses of broken rock, through and over which it at last seemed barely possible to climb. Withers led off the well-defined trail that kept to the lowlands, to take a dim rough trail which turned straight for the wall.

"Here's our Pahute trail," said Withers as he dismounted. "You'll have to walk. Climb slow—rest often—and in bad places keep on the up side of your horse."

The Indians were climbing on foot, leading their mustangs. The mules were bobbing the packs up a zigzag trail. Withers likewise began the ascent. Marian followed, confident and eager, with eyes roving everywhere. Whenever she halted to catch her breath she gazed at the Indians. They did not rest. Nor did the mules.

It made Marian dizzy to look high at the rim. The Indians passed out of her sight and so did the mules, while Withers slowly got far ahead of her. She became extremely hampered and hindered by the horse climbing too fast behind her. He bumped her with his shoulder, nearly knocking her over, and he stepped upon her heels. Marian had to keep ahead of him, and on the increasingly steeper bits of trail this grew almost too much for her.

A burden pressed upon her chest and her legs felt dead. She staggered along and upward, panting laboriously, hot and wet, trying to avoid Buckskin and to keep from looking down into the void that had become awful. The light grew brighter over her. She heard the trader's cheery call of encouragement.

"Fine! Shore, you're there as a climber. But it's nothing to Pahute Canyon," Withers was saying.

"O—h!" panted Marian, as she dragged herself up to fall upon a stone seat.

"Rest a little," said Withers kindly. "And then look around. We're on the rim of Nophaie's country."

That roused Marian to a renewed interest. First she looked back at the lowlands from which she had climbed. How far below! Straight down the trail sheered, yet she had ascended it. The Valley of Gods rose prominently out of the vast stretch of desert, now visible to the eye; and the crowns of the monuments were on a level with the great wall from which Marian gazed. Far away these red stone gods stood up, aloof, stupendous, and grand.

"Shore, I'm glad to see you take to the look of this desert," observed Withers seriously. "Most people don't. Though of course very few ever have the luck to get such a view as this. Well, let's be drifting. We've only climbed the first step up this stairway."

And then Marian dreaded to look toward the west. Yet she was impelled. Huge and beetling, wild with fringe of green trees, another wall obstructed the sky. It was close, and northward it broke off abruptly. Withers was riding off through a forest of cedar trees. Marian got on her horse, not without some sharp pains, and followed the trader.

This bench of fragrant green forest soon led to the base of a rocky rise where Withers waited for her.

"Just let Buckskin have free rein," he said. "I'll keep an eye on you. And say, I saw where an Indian horse's tracks cut in on this trail. I'll bet our Pahute you admired has gotten ahead of us. If so Nophaie will be on his way to meet us before sundown this day."

They began a long climb up over bare yellow rock, wavy, hummocky, ridgy, with hills and holes, that somehow permitted a labyrinthine travel toward the summit. Half a mile this strange slope ascended, at length reaching the level of the huge abutment of stone she had first noted from the rim below. She seemed now on the very summit of the uplands. Yet this was not true. There were farther and higher points to the westward. To the north the view offered wild contrast with long black ranges of mountains rising to peaks of white.

Chapter Six

On the Canyon's Rim

IT WAS hunger that reminded Marian of the passing hours and discovered to her that she had ridden until noon. She had recourse to her sandwich and a bit of chocolate, and a drink from her canteen, grateful for such simple things.

All at once she looked up to see a tremendous gash in the green-forested earth ahead. Withers, on foot, was waiting for her on the brink of a chasm. Far across Marian saw the opposite rim, a red-gold, bare-faced cliff, sheering downward. She was amazed. The very earth seemed to have opened. As she rode up to Withers the chasm deepened to astonishing depths and still she could not see the bottom. The trader halted her before she got to the rim.

"Pahute Canyon," he said. "And it's bad medicine. You've got to walk fast. Because the horses can't go slow and I'll have to lead them. Be sure to keep me in sight, otherwise you might lose the trail."

Marian dismounted, and handing her bridle to the trader she walked to the rim. A ghastly and naked glaring canyon yawned beneath her, tremen-

dously wide and deep, bare of vegetation and blazing with its denuded and colored slopes.

"Wonderful! Fearful!" Marian felt the strange drawing power of the depths. "Oh! it seems impossible even to—to *slide* down there."

"Well, let me get down a ways with the horses before you start, so you won't roll on me," said the trader. "Then you'd shore better come a-sliding, if you want to see Nophaie today. We've got to rustle to make the other rim before dark."

"Do—do you really believe—he'll meet us?" queried Marian.

"I'd gamble on it— Be careful you don't sprain your ankle on these loose stones."

With that Withers looped the bridle of Marian's horse over the pommel, and started him down. Buckskin sent the stones cracking. Then the trader followed, leading his own horse. Marian watched him for a moment. From farther down in the depths soared up the mellow voices of the Indians, evidently calling to the mules. Cracking of rocks and sliding rattles attested to the nature of that descent far below.

Marian had not taken half a dozen steps before she forgot all about the scenery. Caution would not do on this trail. She had to step lightly and swiftly, to be off a loose stone before it could turn with her. There was a thrill in this descent, and she began to grow reckless. Action liberated her spirit, and the faster she progressed the less she felt fear.

Down and down she zigzagged, growing out of breath. The slope of boulders sheered out, affording less precipitous descent. Stones as large as houses lay everywhere. Presently Marian ran out of this boulder zone upon red earth, still steep but affording safer and easier going. Then she ran on down the easy stages over soft ground, soon to find Buckskin standing, bridle dragging in the trail. Withers waited a little way ahead.

"You're no tenderfoot," he said gayly.

"That's all you know," retorted Marian. "My feet appear to be intact, but I assure you I have some tender *places*."

"Did you slide some?"

"I did—and I could surely give pointers to some baseball players I've seen."

"Get on and ride now. Don't be scared of the jump-off places in the trail below. Just hang on."

Marian let Buckskin have free rein. The horses slid down places so steep that she could scarcely keep her seat in the saddle. Some places Buckskin just slipped down. These always meant a deep wash to cross, with a climb up the opposite side. Wither's admonition was faithfully acted upon by Marian, though not always without frantic and violent measures. She was indeed glad when the last incline led down to a sandy wash, that in turn opened out into the canyon floor.

The stream which from above had appeared a thread of silver now proved to be a shallow and wide flow of roily water into which the horses hurried to drink. Withers got off, lay flat, and quenched his own thirst. The Indians had halted beside one of the clumps of green trees and were talking to another Indian who was on foot.

"Take a rest in the shade of these cottonwoods," suggested the trader "You'll need all your strength climbing out. I see some Pahutes."

Not until Marian had ridden across the sandy flat almost to the cotton-

woods did she observe other than the one Indian. Then she saw an Indian woman with a child sitting somewhat beyond the clump of trees. Marian found a piece of chocolate that had escaped her at lunch time. With this she approached the two.

The woman was young and rather pretty, Marian thought. She wore a dark dress of some thick material, a bead necklace round her neck, and silver bracelets studded with turquoises, very crude in design. The child appeared to be a girl of about three years, tiny of form, with little dark, frightened face. The mother showed a shyness that surprised Marian.

"Here," said Marian with a smile, proffering the chocolate.

The child flashed out a brown hand and snatched the candy. Then she shrank closer to her mother, as if to hide behind her. Marian wanted to stand there and make known her friendliness, but out of kindness she turned away.

She saw the flat ground was a cornfield, and that the Pahute man now talking to Withers carried a crude-handled shovel. What a stalwart Indian! As she looked he raised a strong, capable hand, pointing toward a spot above and beyond the canyon.

Withers came to Marian. "The Pahute whose tracks we saw crossed here early this morning. He's shore to meet Nophaie. And he'll tell Nophaie the same he told this Indian here."

"What?" queried Marian, catching her breath.

"Benow di cleash on the Pahute trail," replied the trader with a smile. "That may be strange to these Indians. But it won't be to Nophaie!"

For answer Marian rose, averting her face, and went to her horse. As she reached for the bridle she saw her gloved hand tremble.

Once more she fell in behind Withers and the Indians. They rode up the canyon to a break in the wall, where they turned upward. Withers allowed her to ride for a long distance. A sandy bank ran under the right wall. Running water dashed over the rocks at the bottom of this gorge. Soon the rocks began to encroach upon that sandy strip. Marian saw the Indians above her on the left, toiling over the weathered slide.

At a crossing of the stream Withers bade her dismount. He filled her canteen. Marian found the water cold and fine, free of acrid taste, and very satisfying.

"You should drink oftener," he said, as he watched her. "You'll dry up in this desert. Well, shore you've a climb ahead. Go slow. Be careful. Rest often. You can't miss the trail."

With that he started up a ledge of soft blue rock, leading Marian's horse. His own was evidently in charge of one of the Indians.

The climb she began with forced husbanding of her strength and a restraint to her eagerness. Time enough, if she ever surmounted this frightful steep, to think of Nophaie!

At every convenient rock to sit or lean upon she rested. In half an hour she found the gorge opening wide, bowl-shaped in the center, with slopes of broken rock leading up on all sides. Another half hour apparently made little progress toward the distant rim, yet it brought her to solid rock.

The character of the ascent changed. She became fronted by a succession of rocky steps, leading up to ledges that ran at right angles with the trail, and long narrow strips of rock standing out

from the slope, all bare and smooth, treacherous in slant and too hard to catch the nails of her boots. How the horses ever climbed these slippery places was a mystery to Marian.

Mostly she feared the narrow ledges. For if she slipped on those it might mean the end of her. Treading these, she dare not look over into the abyss, now assuming dreadful depths.

The sky began to lighten. The ragged red rim above seemed possibly attainable. Below her shadows of purple began to gather under the deep walls. Her watch told the hour of five. Marian feared she had made too leisurely a task of it, or had rested too long. Still, these had been her orders from Withers.

At every risky place she grew nervous and hurried. Once she lost her footing and fell, to slide hard against a projecting rock. For an instant she shook all over and her heart seemed to contract. Suppose she had slipped on one of the narrow ledges! With trembling lips she had to bite to still, she began to climb again.

Once more the character of the slope changed. The solid gleaming granite gave way to soft red sandstone. Marian found the going easier here, and if she had not been worn out she would have climbed well. As it was she dragged her weary feet, slow step after step, up the long slants of trail.

Six o'clock by her watch and the gold of sunset on the far points of the rim! It seemed only a short climb now, from every turn, yet she did not get there.

Slowly Marian toiled round an abrupt corner on a bare promontory. She paused, her eyes on the incredible steps she had ascended. Her breast heaved. A cold wind from above cooled her hot, uncovered brow.

Suddenly a cry startled her. Piercingly high and strange it pealed down, and the echoes from the canyon walls magnified it until it died weirdly far below.

With uplift of head Marian swept the rim above. An Indian stood silhouetted against the gold of sky. Slender and tall, motionless as a statue, he stood.

"Nophaie!" whispered Marian, with a leap of her heart.

He waved his hand aloft, a slow gesture, significant and thrilling. Marian waved her sombrero in reply, and tried to call out, but just then her voice failed. Wheeling away with swift strides, shot through and through with a current of fire, she began the last few zigzags of that trail.

Endless that last climb—unattainable the rim! Marian had overreached herself. Dizzy, half blind, with bursting heart she went on, upward, toward Nophaie. She saw him dimly as in a dream. He was coming! Then Nophaie held her close, her cheek against his breast.

"Benow di cleash!"

"Nophaie!"

There was no other greeting between them. He did not kiss her, and his close clasp slowly loosened. Marian rallied to the extent of being able to stand and she slipped away from him, still holding his hand.

Dark as bronze his fine face had grown, lean and older, graver, with long sloping lines of pain, not wholly hidden by his smile of welcome. His eyes, black and piercing with intense light, burned into hers. Unutterable love and joy shone in them.

"Nophaie—you have—changed," she said breathlessly.

"So have you," he replied.

"How have—I—changed?" murmured Marian.

"Still Benow di cleash, but woman now, more than girl. It's the same face I saw first at Cape May, only more beautiful, Marian."

"At least you've not changed Lo Blandy's habit of flattery."

"Do not call me that," he said.

Marian hesitated. "Must we get acquainted all over?" she asked.

"You must."

"Very well, I am ready."

"Then you have come to work among my people?"

"Of course," replied Marian simply. "I've come to do what you want me to."

Love and loyalty spoke unmistakably in her voice and in the gaze with which she met his piercing eyes.

"You prove my faith. You save me from hate of the white race." Loosening her hands, he took a long stride toward the rim and gazed away across the purple canyon.

Then Marian had her first real sight of him. This appeared but a shadow of the magnificent form of the famous athlete, Lo Blandy. Thinned out, lean and hard he looked. He was dressed in worn corduroy and velveteen, with silver-buckled belt and brown moccasins. His black hair was drawn back and bound under a red band that encircled his head. If there had ever been anything untrue or unreal about him, it was gone now.

"I'm glad for what you think I am," she said, stepping to his side. "For what you say I do— And I want to—to make you happy."

"Happy! Benow di cleash, this is the first happy moment I have ever lived—since I was a shepherd boy—Nophaie, down there with the sheep. Happy, because, Indian as I am, I know you love me."

"Yes, I—I love you, Nophaie," she said, low, unsteadily.

Hand in hand then they gazed out across the purpling depths and the gold-rimmed walls, to the vast heave of desert beyond.

"Come, we must go," said Nophaie. "You are tired and hungry. Withers will make camp some miles from here."

His mustang was the largest Marian had seen, a wild shaggy animal of tan color. They rode side by side through a fragrant level land of piñon and sage, with the afterglow of sunset lighting the western sky.

She talked a little while of their last times together at the seashore, and then of friends of hers whom he knew, and lastly of her home, in which she had no longer seemed to fit happily. Nophaie listened without comment. When, however, she broached the subject of her arrival in the West, and her reception by the Witherses, she found him communicative. Withers was a good man, a trader who helped the Indians and did not make his post a means to cheat them. Mrs. Withers was more to the Indians than any other white person had ever been.

Presently the thickening twilight was pierced by the bright blaze of a campfire. And Marian followed the Indian down into a shallow ravine where a gleam of water reflected the blaze and the dark branches of cedar trees. Withers was busy at the supper tasks.

"Well, here you are," he called out

cheerily. "Nophaie, turn Buckskin loose and lend a hand here. Shore, we'll soon have this lady tenderfoot comfortable and happy."

After the meal Withers and Nophaie made short work of what tasks were left to do. Withers erected the little tent under the piñon near the fire, and then drawled, "Shore, I reckon that's about all." Then bidding Nophaie and Marian good night, he discreetly retired to his own bed under an adjoining piñon.

The night silence settled down upon the camp, so lonely and sweet, so strangely full for Marian, that she was loath to break it. She watched Nophaie. In the flickering light his face seemed impassively sad, a bronze mask molded in the mood of sorrow.

"Will you stay with us tonight?" she asked, at last.

"No. I will ride back to my hogan," he said.

"Is it far?"

"For you, yes. I will ride back to meet you in the morning."

"Is your—your home at Oljato?"

"No. Oljato is down in the lowland. Some of my people live there."

He went on to tell of his only living kin. And he fell to talking of himself—how he had chosen this wildest and loneliest part of the reservation because he wanted to be far away from white people. He had acquired a small flock. He owned a few mustangs. He was the poorest Indian he knew. He did not possess even a saddle or a gun. His means of livelihood was the selling of wool and hides, and working for some of the rich Indians in that section. He had taught them how much better corn would grow in plowed land. He built dams to hold the spring freshets from the melting snows and thus conserve water for the long period of drought. What his tribe needed most was to learn ways that were better than theirs. But they were slow to change.

Marian hesitated to voice her sympathy and perplexity. She could help Nophaie. But how? Maybe he did not want more sheep, more horses, more clothes and blankets, a gun and a saddle. Marian felt that she must go slowly. Nophaie's simplicity was striking. Had she ever dined at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel with this very Indian? Incredible!

After a long silence, which Marian yearned to break, but could not, Nophaie rose and touched her hair with his hand.

"Benow di cleash, your eyes are heavy," he said. "You must sleep. But I shall lie awake. I will start back with the sunrise. Good night."

Would he bend to kiss her? She had treasured and remembered his kisses, few as they had been. But he moved away, silently, his tall form dark against the pale starlit sky, and vanished from her sight.

Marian repaired to the little tent and its bed of blankets.

Chapter Seven

The Infidel

UPON awakening next morning Marian realized how dearly she must pay for her horseback rides and climbs on foot. Breakfast had to be kept waiting for her, and Withers expressed both solicitude and amusement.

"I may look funny, but I don't feel

funny," complained Marian. "How will I ever live through this trip? Oh-h-h! those awful trails straight down and up!"

"We'll not go back the Pahute Canyon," replied Withers. "Now you eat all you can and walk around some. You'll find you feel better."

Marian was so sore and stiff that she had not the slightest faith in what he said, yet upon following his advice she found he had spoken truly. Nevertheless, when she came to mount Buckskin she had an ordeal that left her smarting with pain. Gradually the exercise warmed her blood and eased her pangs. Then she began again to have interest in her surroundings.

The slow heave of piñon and cedar forest reached its highest ridge after perhaps an hour of riding. The sun was then high, and it lighted an enormous country of purple sage and clumps of piñons and yellow mounds of rock, now clear to Marian's gaze.

Withers waited for her, and as she rode abreast of his position he pointed far down and across the purple plain.

"Nophaie is riding to meet us," he said. "Show me what good eyes you have."

Eagerly Marian strained her gaze in the direction he was pointing, but she could not see anything that resembled a horse and rider.

"Farther to the left. There, in line with that clay-colored bluff under the mountain. Keep your eye close down along the sage— Two moving dots, one white—one black."

"Yes! Yes! I see those dots. But how tiny! Can they be horses?"

"Shore they can. Nophaie is riding the black and driving the white. I'll bet there's a present for you."

"For me! You think so? That would be wonderful. Oh, will I be able to ride it?"

"Some of these Pahute ponies are well-broken and gentle. I don't think Nophaie would give you anything else."

Marian had use for her eyes from that moment on. She rode with gaze searching for the moving dots. Sometimes she lost them and had difficulty in finding them again. But gradually they grew larger and larger until they assumed the forms of horses, loping gracefully across the sage, lending wild and beautiful life to that lonely desert.

The time came when she clearly saw Nophaie. Then she made the astonishing discovery that the white mustang had a long black mane and tail, flying in the breeze. At closer view Marian was sure she had never seen any horse so beautiful.

At sight of the Indians and the mules he halted, standing on a ridge, head up, mane flying. Then Nophaie caught up with him and drove him down into the trail, where he swerved to go round the mules. He pranced and tossed his head and whistled. It appeared presently that his wildness was only a spirit of youth and temper, for he evinced an inclination to trot along with the other horses. Nophaie's mount, however, was a really wild creature, a black, shaggy stallion, powerfully built, but ungainly.

Nophaie's greeting to Marian was in his Indian language, the meaning of which was unmistakable. Then, indicating the white mustang, he said, "I've brought you one of my ponies. He's Pahute, and the gentlest and best gaited horse I've seen out here."

"Oh, thank you, Nophaie! How beautiful he is! He looks as if he'd jump right over the moon."

"He wants to run, and he's lively, but you can ride him," replied Nophaie. "Would you like to try him now?"

"I'd love to, but, Nophaie, I—well—it's just all I can do to stay on *this* horse at the present moment. Perhaps tomorrow I will feel up to it. How far to your camp, Nophaie?"

"Riding at this gait, we'll get there at noon. Suppose we lope ahead. That will rest you."

A touch and word from her were all Buckskin needed. Indeed, he seemed to be both surprised and pleased. He broke into a long lope that Marian found a most agreeable change of gait and altogether delightful motion. It changed everything—her sensations, the scenery, the colors and smells, the feel of the wind. Nophaie loped beside her, outside of the trail, through the sage.

Marian imagined there could be no place in the world more beautiful than this boundless sage-plain, purple in color and heavy with its dry, sweet tang, lonely and wild, with the great mountain to the fore, and away across the distance the strange, calling, vast and naked desert of rock.

When at the end of three or four miles Nophaie called for her to pull Buckskin to a walk she found herself breathless, utterly reckless, and full of wild longings to race on and on, to capture this new exquisite joy just liberated, to range the desert and forget the world.

"Oh!—splendid!" she cried. "I—never knew—what a ride—could be. You must race—with me."

"Wait till you get on your white pony tomorrow. He will run like the wind."

They slowed to a walk and rode side by side. Marian awoke to the realization of a stinging happiness. Could it last?

They rode on across the undulating sea of purple, for a while at a walk, talking, and then breaking again into a lope, and from that to slower progress once more.

The *baa-baa* of sheep suddenly pierced the air.

"My flock," replied Nophaie, answering Marian's quick look.

"Where?" she asked eagerly.

"In the cedars there. Benow di cleash, here is the home of Nophaie."

Marian's keen eyes swept the half-circle of country indicated by Nophaie's slow impressive gesture. She saw that they had ridden down miles and miles of gentle slope, which ended in a vale marked by richer luxuriance and purple of the sage, by clumps of beautiful cedar trees, and by isolated red and yellow mounds of rock. Above loomed the great mountain, now close enough to dominate and protect. A bare rock-floored stream bed meandered through the vale, with crystal water gleaming on smooth inclines and tinkling over little falls. A column of blue smoke rose from among the cedars.

Nophaie led Marian in among the cedars. For her camp site Nophaie chose a very large cedar, with branches spreading over a little sliding fall and pool in the stream.

"Here I have thought of you many and many an hour, and dreamed, and tried to pray," said Nophaie. "We will put your tent here, and your bed here, for you must sleep in the open, unless it rains. Come now, rest a while—then you can meet Maahesenie, my relative. You will see my hogan and my sheep."

Nophaie helped her out of the saddle and arranged a comfortable seat for her in the shade of the old cedar with

the beautiful pool of amber water at her feet.

"Cold snow water from Nothsis Ahn, my Mountain of Light," he said.

She drank deep of that pure water, so cold it had to be taken slowly.

Nophaie unsaddled the horses and turned them loose. A shaggy gray animal came bounding to him.

"Here's Taddy, my shepherd—and he looks like the Taddy of my boyhood. Taddy, go to Benow di cleash."

Marian held out her hand and called "Taddy." He advanced slowly, obediently, and without fear or distrust. He permitted her hand to pat his fine head. He was as curious about Marian as she was about him, and vastly less inclined to friendliness.

Nophaie came to look down upon Marian, something soft and glad in his dark eyes.

"Benow di cleash, to see you here—to have you come for my sake!" he exclaimed with emotion.

"Nophaie, it is as good for me as for you."

"That could not be," he replied with a grave smile. "Your soul is not in danger."

"Nophaie!" she exclaimed.

But he offered no word in explanation of his strange speech, and, bidding her rest, he strode away, with the dog beside him. Marian was left alone. The shade was cool, making it needful to cover herself with her coat. She fell asleep. Upon awakening, it seemed to her a long time had lapsed, for she felt wonderfully rested. Withers and the Indians had arrived with the pack outfit and were making camp some little distance away. It was Nophaie who brought her duffle bag and roll of bedding. Withers followed, carrying tent and ax.

The two men erected the tent on one side of Marian, and spread the canvas roll with the blankets on the other.

"Young lady, you'll see the stars and get your nose nipped tonight," observed Withers.

"Nipped? By stars—or what?" she queried.

"By frost," he returned. Then seriously he continued: "Well, I'm going to ride over here some ten miles south, round the corner of the mountain where an old Pahute lives," continued Withers. "I buy a good deal from him, and he buys from me. Etenia's an industrious, intelligent Indian. The blankets of his women are the best we buy. Nophaie, he's wealthy. I should think he would go shares with you in some sheep deal."

"Yes, he would," replied Nophaie, "but he wanted me to marry his daughter, and when I refused he grew very angry. Said I had Indian body and white-man mind."

"Humph! that's pretty serious," returned Withers soberly, and, shouldering his ax, he turned toward his camp.

"Is it serious, Nophaie?" asked Marian.

"I'm afraid so—for me. My people are proud that I have renounced the white man. But they expect me to fall at once into their ways. I tried. I have failed in many things."

"I'm rested now," she said, rising. "Take me to see your hogan and Maah—whatever you called him."

Beyond the stream some hundred or more yards, in an open space of higher ground, stood a large beehive-shaped mound of red earth with a column of blue smoke rising from the center of its round roof. At nearer view Marian saw that the earth had been plastered thickly over a frame-work of wood.

The open door faced the east.

Nophaie spoke to her, bidding her enter. She stooped to go in. A smoldering fire occupied the center of this habitation called a hogan, and the smoke from it seemed to float round and round, to drift at last up through the hole in the roof.

A few iron and stone utensils lay scattered beside the fire. A haunch of meat hung from one of the posts, and beside it on the ground lay a sack of flour, with some boxes and tins that evidently contained food supplies. Besides these there were two beds in the hogan, one on either side of the fire, close to the wall.

"Which bed is yours?" asked Marian, unable to restrain her curiosity.

"Here," said Nophaie.

His action designated an Indian blanket and a sheepskin with woolly side uppermost. Obviously the former was Nophaie's coverlet, and the latter was his mattress. She forced her gaze to search farther, to the end that she saw an old coat, a leather pouch studded with silver buttons, and a worn hunting knife. These then were Nophaie's possessions and this was his home. Suddenly Marian's eyes blurred and smarted.

"I sleep out under the cedar often, but Maahesenie doesn't like that," said Nophaie.

"Let me see your sheep," rejoined Marian.

She did not speak, nor did Nophaie, while they were threading a way through the tall sagebrush. She saw purple berries on the cedar trees, and a golden dustlike powder upon the foliage. Then she heard the baa of sheep and bleat of lambs.

Soon Marian emerged from the zone of cedars into the open sage, and here her sight was charmed by a flock of sheep and goats, and many lambs. The lambs all appeared as fleecy white as wool could be. They played round Marian's feet and had no fear of her.

Then she observed another Indian, tall and gaunt, with stooped shoulders and iron-gray hair. He folded a thin blanket round him as he walked toward her. What a record of life was his face! Years and storms of the desert!

"Maahesenie—Benow di cleash," said Nophaie.

"How do?" returned the Indian, extending a brown hand to Marian.

She shook hands with him and greeted him, not, however, without hesitation over the pronunciation of his name.

"White girl come far?" he asked, with slow curving arm extended toward the east.

"Yes, very far," replied Marian.

"Saddle heap hard seat—huh?" he queried with a twinkle in his eyes.

Marian nodded and laughed her affirmation. Maahesenie had observed in her walk the evident tell-tale truth of how the saddle had punished her. This old Indian was laughing at her. But when he addressed Nophaie it was with dignity and gravity, and his gestures made known to Marian the fact that he was talking about her. When he ended Nophaie led her back toward the camp.

"What did he say about me?" she asked, very curious.

"Enough to make you vain. He said, 'Eyes of the sky and hair of the sun.' Then something about your skin being like a sago lily."

"Well, bless him!" exclaimed Marian in delighted surprise. "And what's a sago lily?"

"Most beautiful of desert flowers. They grow in the deep canyons."

Marian slept again for a couple of hours, and awoke to feel somewhat eased of pangs and weariness. The afternoon was far spent, waning in a solemn glory of light and peace.

Withers called her to an early supper. Nophaie sat with her, and the other Indians sat opposite. All of them did justice to the extraordinary meal served by the trader.

Afterward Nophaie walked with Marian, singularly thoughtful and sad. Suddenly he pointed to a distant cone-shaped mound of stone that appeared to have a monument on its summit.

"I want you to climb there with me—tonight or tomorrow," he said.

"Take me now," she replied. "But why there particularly?"

"I want you to see my Marching Rocks from there—and my Mountain of Light."

They climbed from the eastern side, walking in long zigzag slants, and resting often. Near the summit there was a depression, the upper side of which terminated in the point of stone that supported the monument. This pyramid of rocks stood eight or ten feet high, and crude as it was it had some semblance of symmetry and dignity.

"Who built it?" asked Marian.

"Men of my tribe," replied Nophaie.

"What does it mean?"

"It signifies a place for prayer. Indians climb here to pray. Never unless they have something to pray for."

"Have *you* prayed here?"

"Many times," replied Nophaie.

"Are you going to pray—now?"

"Yes, to my Marching Rocks and to my Mountain of Light and to the Blue Wind."

With that Nophaie again took Marian by the hand and led her up the remaining few steps to the summit of this stone hill which had obstructed the view.

"Look, Benow di cleash," he said.

Marian did as she was bidden, suddenly to become silent and thrilled, motionless as the monument upon which she rested a reverent hand.

Below, a cedared plateau, gray with grass and sage, led eastward toward bare mounds of rock, isolated and strangely set, with semblance to great prehistoric beasts. Scattered and striking they led on over the wide green plain, round and bare and huge, all seeming to move forward, to march on, to be impelled, to be endowed with mighty and majestic life. Marching Rocks!

"Benow di cleash, the sculptor who carved those Marching Rocks is the wind," said Nophaie. Then he bade Marian sit down and lean against him beside the monument.

"We will watch the sun set over the desert," he added. "Sunset—the fulfilment, the glory, the end of the Indian's day! White people do not rise to see the breaking of the morning light. And they do not care to watch the declining sun. But for Indians these hours are rituals."

To the west, where Nophaie directed Marian's rapt gaze, the scale grew grand. The purple shadows now began to define the canyons and lift the wavy knolls of red rock. From out of the direct west swept majestic escarpments, level and dark, to overshadow the world of carved and graven marching rocks. Farther around, beyond the blazing center of the west, began the black jagged uplift of Nophaie's Mountain of Light. It sheered up to a round,

white-patched, black-fringed dome. The pure snow and lofty pine held dominion there.

Every moment the spectacle changed, and out over the wasteland there was chaos of light and color. Marian's emotion increased with the growing transformation. Before her eyes stretched a belt of naked earth, two hundred miles long and one hundred wide, curving from east to west. There was no movement, no sound, nothing but the stark unflung nakedness of the earth, beyond comprehension to the human mind, exalting to the soul.

The dark walls of granite grew dusky red. The shadows lengthened and widened and deepened. Thousands of rock ridges, facing the sun, marched down to meet it.

The air grew chill. The great light was fading. Over most of the rocky area the strange gray shadow encroached while Marian gazed; only to the eastward did the bright gleams of sunlight fall upon the highest faces of the Marching Rocks.

The ball of half-clouded fire tipped the slope of Nothsis Ahn, and the chasms became veiled in haze of rose. Nophaie's mountain grew dark and clear against the steel-blue sky. The desert darkened.

A golden glow on cloud and sky marked the place where the sun had gone down. The earth of naked stone seemed to gather power, to rise, to come out clear and cold, to reach for the encroaching twilight.

Marian turned to Nophaie and said, "I have seen. I feel all you feel—"

Nophaie rose, lifting her with him, and towered over her, his face as she had never beheld it. Mystery and grief, age and strength, came out in the bronzed lineaments.

"*I am an infidel!*" he said hoarsely.

The shock of intense surprise sustained by Marian prevented her speaking.

"I did not know this when I came back to the reservation," Nophaie went on, as if passion-driven. "I tried to return to the religion of my people. I prayed—trying to believe. But I cannot. *I am an infidel!* I cannot believe in the Indian's God—I will not believe in the white man's God."

"Oh, Nophaie!" gasped Marian. "Your faith—will come back."

"Never. My white teaching killed it. The Indian's religion is best for him. This Morgan kills the Indian's simple faith in his own God—makes him an infidel—then tries to make him a Christian. It cannot be done. There is not one real Christian Indian on the reservation."

"Why—that is terrible!" replied Marian. "But you—Nophaie—I am distressed. Oh, do you mean you have no belief in a future life?"

"An infidel has no faith."

"But yours will come back. It must. I will help you. Surely your religion is as good as mine. Nophaie, we must strive and pray for yours."

"Marian, cannot you understand?" asked Nophaie in pathetic earnestness. "The knowledge forced upon me by white people makes it impossible for me to believe in the Indian's religion."

"Impossible!" echoed Marian.

A silent and impressive spreading of his hands, gesture of impotence and helplessness, fixed in Marian's mind the immutability of Nophaie's spiritual catastrophe.

"Let us go down before night falls," said Nophaie, taking her hand.

With careful little steps Marian es-

sayed the descent of the stone hill, which in the gathering darkness was difficult. By the time they had reached a level twilight had enfolded the sage.

"Nophaie, listen to my plan for work among your people," said Marian. And forthwith she briefly told him the result of her interviews with Mrs. Withers.

Nophaie expressed approval, and was particularly desirous of having her find a place at Mesa, in the school.

"You can do so much good," he said. "The young Indian girls will love you. There's one Indian girl you must look after. She is Gekin Yashi—the Little Beauty. She is fourteen years old and large for her age. I know her father, Do etin—the Gentleman. He is a fine old Indian. He approves of the school and likes good missionaries, but he hates Morgan, who seems to be in control at Mesa. He is too much interested in Gekin Yashi."

"Ah!—Nophaie, I am beginning to understand a little of the Indian problem," replied Marian.

"That is good. Now tell me, you will stay here a little? So we can ride and climb and talk?"

"Yes, I'll stay two days. Withers cannot spare more. Then I'll go back to Kaidab—then to Mesa, where I'll begin my work, for you, Nophaie. You will come to Mesa?"

"Yes. I'll ride there every week. But we must meet in secret—somewhere out in the desert, to protect you. The agent Blucher has only seen me twice, but he took instant dislike to me as soon as he learned I was an educated Indian. He is bad medicine, Marian. Blucher and Morgan run the reservation and the school, not for government or Indians, but for themselves. You will soon see through them."

"Then you'll come every week," rejoined Marian gladly. "You think I must meet you secretly? I am not ashamed, Nophaie. I am proud of—of my friendship with you."

"Blucher and Morgan must not know you meet me," declared Nophaie. "You could not stay there after they found out. I'll ride to Kaidab in ten days and find out from Mrs. Withers what you've done at Mesa. Then I'll write you and tell you when I'll come."

Chapter Eight

Nophaie's Secret Agent

THAT year the summer rains came late—just in time to save the upland country from severe drought. Nophaie's people all attributed the coming of the black thunderstorms and the down-dropping veils of moisture and the rainbows curving over the desert, to the efficacy of their prayers.

Up under the brow of Nothsis Ahn these rains were cold even in August. Maahesenie, who tended the flock during Nophaie's frequent absences, was exposed to these cold rains. Indian as he was, he did not seek shelter. And when Nophaie returned from Kaidab he found his only relative seriously ill.

"Maahesenie, you have what white medicine men call rheumatism. It is caused by exposure to cold and wet. You must keep very warm and dry."

"Maahesenie is victim of the Evil Spirit," replied the old Indian. "Maahesenie thought evil thoughts. A whirlwind, traveling from right to left, which is the wrong way, struck Maahesenie when he did not know the

prayer to say. And it caused his body to be twisted. Maahesenie must have medicine to straighten him. Maahesenie must smoke the medicine in a jet pipe which the medicine man carries in his medicine bag."

Therefore Nophaie had to ride forth across the uplands to fetch a medicine man of the tribe. This old Indian gave Maahesenie the jet pipe to smoke, and when that custom had been observed he took some salt from his medicine bag, and wetting this in his mouth he mixed it with the ashes from the pipe. Then he proceeded to rub this upon Maahesenie and to massage him, meanwhile chanting what Nophaie recognized as the Wind Chant. Nophaie approved of the massaging.

The medicine man's next treatment was to procure flat rocks from the stream outside, and to pour different-colored sands from his medicine bag upon these rocks. These maneuvers in sand soon took the form of symmetrical figures, over which the medicine man mumbled impressive and weird incantation. This done, he brushed the sand from the rocks, left the hogan, and went on his way.

Nophaie was not amazed to see Maahesenie very much better and able to get up. Probably if he had been a young man the treatment would have made him well. But he was old and used up, and next day he again fell victim to the slow twisting knot of his muscles. He gave up then and in somber and silent stoicism awaited the end. Nophaie divided his time between Maahesenie and the sheep.

One day nearly a month after Maahesenie had been stricken a Pahute rode into camp with a letter for Nophaie. It had been typewritten, and was without address or signature, yet he knew who had written it and that it was important.

"I have ridden three times to our meeting-place, once each week on the day set, and have been disappointed, and worried and distressed that you did not come.

"Today I met Withers at the trading-post and he told me Maahesenie was dying. I am very sorry, yet relieved in that I now know what has detained you. Withers said he would wait while I wrote this letter to you and take it to Kaidab and send it to you by special messenger.

"Do not send me any more letters through the mail. If you cannot come to meet me—and I'll ride out every week on the day we set—do not send messages unless in care of Withers. It is not safe. My mail from the East has been opened. I doubt not that my letters home have been opened. The clerk in the post office is merely a tool of Blucher. No letter of importance sent East to government or missionary board would ever get by this agent, unless favorable to him and Morgan.

"Two weeks ago Blucher asked me to do office work for him several hours each day after my regular duty at the school. I thought it policy to oblige him, but I insisted on one afternoon for myself, which of course is the time I am to meet you. Blucher apparently thinks well of me. As for Morgan, the Indians hate him. Never in a hundred years would they believe one word he preaches or says.

"This duty in Blucher's office has been prolific of much information for me. Blucher is German. He is deeply concerned over the war in Europe. He hates England and he hates America. I know how to serve him to my own

interest. But Morgan is suspicious of everyone. He really is in control here. When any new government employee or missionary comes here Morgan loses no time in his peculiar politics. By his lies and persuasions he influences the newcomer to his side. If he fails, then he at once takes violent hatred of this interloper and begins by cunning to have him or her ousted. He really has something he can use against Blucher. That would not be difficult for an intelligent person to find. For instance, the half-breed Noki Indian, Sam Ween, is Blucher's interpreter. Blucher pays Sam twenty dollars a month, when he pays him at all. I asked Sam. And I saw in government papers the amount appropriated by the government for Blucher's interpreter!

"Morgan's most important emissary is Miss Herron, the matron of the Indian girls. I have won the love and trust of Gekin Yashi. Though very shy and afraid she tells me her troubles. Miss Herron hates her. And my interest in Gekin Yashi has incurred Miss Herron's enmity toward me.

"Do etin, the father of Gekin Yashi, will not allow her to go to Morgan's house or chapel. Morgan has influenced Blucher to have a rule enforced whereby Indian girls are compelled to go to Morgan's chapel to hear him preach. This rule is about to go into effect.

"Gekin Yashi is so afraid of Morgan that she actually shakes when I speak of him. The only way I can see to save Gekin Yashi is for you to steal her away from this school and hide her in one of those wild canyons until Morgan forgets her.

"This is a long letter, and Withers is waiting. My personal messages must go until I see you, which I hope indeed will be soon."

Nophaie pondered over this letter and reread it, only to become more somber and thoughtful. The plan suggested by Marian had occurred to him also, and now in the light of her revelation he decided he would risk stealing Gekin Yashi from the school.

Maahesenie died one night while Nophaie slept. Although he had expected this, the actual fact was a shock.

Nophaie paid stern and strict observance to the burial custom of the tribe. Indians of his own tribe came to view Maahesenie, but left him for Nophaie to bury.

Nophaie had assisted at the funeral services of several of the tribe. He knew what to do, though he could not recall most of the prayers and chants.

First he dressed Maahesenie in his best garments and moccasins and silver. Then he set about the difficult labor of digging a grave.

Next day Nophaie, according to the custom of the tribe, broke a hole in the hogan. The dead body of Maahesenie must not be taken through the door. And it must be carried in a perfectly straight line to the grave. Nophaie wrapped Maahesenie in his best blanket and carried him out and lowered him into the grave.

Nophaie's next duty was to cover the dead man and fill the hole level to the sage. Maahesenie's saddle had then to be split and laid upon the grave. Following this ceremony Nophaie went out into the sage to bring in Maahesenie's horses, three of which must be sacrificed.

Rigidly as Nophaie desired to conform to the Indian's rituals, he had to fight himself all the way. Maahesenie's horses were not many and three of them were all Nophaie could find near at hand. What a pity to kill them!

Sunset of that day found Nophaie's tasks ended, except to destroy or burn the hogan. He waived this last custom of the tribe, but he did not enter the hogan and never would again. He erected a brush shelter under the cedar where Marian had slept. At dawn next morning he rode out into the sage on the trail to Mesa.

A few miles from the eastern slope of Nothsis Ahn he sheered off the trail to visit a Pahute camp where he engaged a boy to tend his sheep during his absence. The Pahutes were glad to see Nophaie and made him welcome. They were rich in sheep and horses; their wants were few; they lived, peaceful and contented, in the loneliness of their desert home. They never saw a white man, except on the infrequent trips to trading-posts. Nophaie rode on his way sad and pondering, wishing that he too could be as happy and self-sufficient as they.

His route lay through the range of the prosperous old Nopah chief, Etenia, the Wealthy, who had words of sympathy for Nophaie's loss of kin, and forgot his reason for discord. Nophaie did not tarry there long, however.

He loped along the sage trail, with the cool fragrance of desert in his face, the wide green-clumped expanse of purple open to his eye. How immeasurably far apart he felt from the people who lived there! Every day brought more bitter proof. He had the instincts, the emotions, the soul of an Indian, but his thoughts about himself, his contemplation of himself and his people, were not those of the red man.

That day, as many times before, he came upon the Testing Stone, lying along the trail. It stood about two feet high and was bulky. This was the stone that made a brave of a boy. There were many stones like this one scattered over the Indian country, and boys of every family tugged and toiled over them, day after day and year after year, until that wonderful time came when they could lift and carry them. When an Indian youth could lift that stone he had become a brave; when he could carry it he was a strong man. If he could carry it far he was a giant.

Nophaie dismounted. Drawing a deep breath and bending down, Nophaie encircled that stone with his arms and heaved to the uttermost of his strength. He lifted it. He moved it a little way. And then its ponderous weight dragged him down, loosed his hold, and left him wet with sweat and labored of chest. Bitterly he gazed down at this proof of the Indian sinew. Maahesenie in his prime had lifted that very stone to his shoulder and had carried it for one hundred steps.

Nophaie rode on his way, and thought of Benow di cleash, and watched the changing panorama. Suddenly his horse rounded a cedar tree and shied at a monument.

Nophaie had often seen this pile of stones, but never had it halted him until now. It had peculiar significance for him. Whenever an Indian passed that way, bent on a hunt or a quest involving peril, he gathered a sprig of cedar from the tree and, laying it on the monument, he placed a stone over it and spoke his prayer.

Nophaie yielded to the instinct that impelled him to reach for a sprig of

cedar. He added his stone to the monument and spoke a prayer for his adventure.

Eight hours' steady riding across country brought Nophaie to the crest of the great plateau from which he saw the long green lines of poplar trees that marked the location of Mesa. Some wind-carved rocks of yellow marked the spot Nophaie and Marian had chosen as a rendezvous. The time was about the middle of the afternoon, rather early for Marian. Therefore Nophaie composed himself to wait.

By and by his vigil was rewarded by sight of a white horse gliding out from the green and heading toward his covert. Nophaie watched Marian come. She had learned to sit a saddle like an Indian. Nophaie felt the shadows lift from his soul, the doubts from his mind.

Five weeks had changed Benow di cleash. As she talked on and on Nophaie listened, and watched her. What had become of the fair skin, so like the pearly petal of a sago lily? Her face was now golden-brown, and thinner, and older, too, except when she smiled. Only the blue eyes and hair of gold now held her claim to Benow di cleash. Her form had lost something of its former fullness. The desert summer was working upon her; the hot winds were drying up her flesh.

Then she passed from news of her friends in the East to matters at Mesa, and told humorous things that had delighted her in the Indian children. From tales of the Indian children she shifted to an account of the intrigue at Mesa, which was now involving friends she had made there, a young Texan and his wife, who were in trouble, owing to the machinations of Blucher and Morgan.

Nophaie knew the Texan, whose name was Wolterson. He was a government stockman and his duties were to ride out over the ranges to instruct the Indians in the care of sheep and horses and cattle. What little Nophaie had heard from the Indians about Wolterson was all to his credit.

"After I've gone today," concluded Marian, "I want you to ride down and see Wolterson. Then ask the Indians about him. Soon Blucher will trump up some charge against him and call an investigation. Unless Wolterson can disprove it he will be dismissed. Then we'd lose a good friend of the Indians. Wolterson has befriended Do etin. That is the real cause of Morgan's enmity."

"And—Gekin Yashi?" asked Nophaie, in slow reluctance.

"Safe and well, still," replied Marian in glad eagerness. "Morgan has been to Flagerstown. Blucher has been wrangling all his time with his henchmen—Jay Lord and Ruhr and Glendon. I don't hear much, but enough. It's mostly about Wolterson now and something about the land and water mess stirred up by the Nokis at Copenwashie. Friel has obtained a patent to the land once owned or at least controlled by the Nokis. Blucher, of course, aided Friel in this deal, but now he is sore about it.

"Gekin Yashi is ready to run off. We contrived to get permission for her to visit her father. Wolterson is dipping Do etin's sheep and this morning Gekin Yashi rode out to the hogan. She's there now and will remain over Sunday. You can go out there at night and make your plans to meet her as she rides back alone."

"I shall take Gekin Yashi to a Pahute in the Valley of Silent Walls," rejoined

Nophaie thoughtfully. "But few Nopahs know this place. It is down under the west side of Nothsis Ahn, deep in the canyons."

"Will you take me there some day?"

"Yes, Benow di cleash," replied Nophaie. "But you run a danger."

"Of what—whom?"

"Me!"

Marian flushed under her golden tan and her eyes searched his. "You—you are jesting."

"No. I think I am telling the truth," responded Nophaie. "Some day the savage and civilized man in me will come to strife. My Valley of Silent Walls is the most enchanting—the wildest and most beautiful place—the loneliest in all this desert. If I ever got you down there I might never let you go."

"Well, you frighten me," laughed Marian. "But if all goes well—take me there to visit Gekin Yashi. Will you?"

"Could you get away from here?"

"Nophaie, I will never be permitted to work long at Mesa," replied Marian. "Some day Blucher will awake to my two-faced nature."

"Well, then I will take you to my Valley of Silent Walls."

Marian placed her hand on Nophaie's and looked up into his face. "Nophaie—Gekin Yashi loves you."

"That child! Why, she has seen me but a few times," protested Nophaie, painfully reminded of Do etin's proposal that he marry his daughter.

"No matter. Gekin Yashi is a woman in feeling. I think she is very lovable and sweet."

"Marian, are you thinking that the way for me to save Gekin Yashi is to marry her?" inquired Nophaie.

"It might—be," murmured Marian tremulously, "if—if you—"

"But I do not love her and I cannot marry her," declared Nophaie. "So much has white education done for me."

After that no more was said about Gekin Yashi.

Chapter Nine

Escape to the Desert

AT THE upper end of the long poplar-lined avenue that constituted the only street in Mesa, the Woltersons occupied a little stone house built by the earliest founders of the settlement. On the other side of this house lay a garden that bordered on the spacious playground of the Indian school.

Nophaie watered his horse at the thin swift stream that ran down from the lake through Wolterson's garden, and along the fence to the orchards. The sun was westering low and the heat of the day was dying. Nophaie went into the open gate of the Wolterson place and let his horse graze on the rich grass bordering the irrigation ditch.

"Howdy, Nophaie!" drawled a slow voice. "Shore am glad to see you."

Nophaie returned the greeting of the Texan, speaking in his own tongue. Wolterson was a young man, tall and lithe, with a fine clean-cut face.

Nophaie dropped the bridle of his horse and took a seat near where Wolterson was damming up an intersection from the irrigating ditch.

"The Nopahs think well of you and your work," said Nophaie presently. "You're the first stockman they ever praised. If you are brought before an investigating committee I'll get Etenia,

and Tohoniah bi dony, and several more influential chiefs to testify for you."

"Shore that's fine, Nophaie," declared Wolterson.

Nothing was said about Gekin Yashi. Wolterson spoke of his plans for dipping sheep over the ranges as far as Etenia's place. Nophaie and the Pahutes of that upland country must drive their flocks down there. Then Wolterson informed Nophaie that the government was going to instigate a blood test of cattle and horses, for tuberculosis.

"Any horse or steer that has become infected will have to be shot," said Wolterson seriously. "Now isn't it going to be hard to convince the Indians of the necessity of this?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it can't be done," replied Nophaie. "Is there a real necessity of testing stock for this disease?"

"I think so. I have sent my approval to Washington. Nophaie, would you be willing to help me by explaining this test to your people?"

"I will, if you can convince *me* of its need."

"Well, when the order comes I'll ride first to your range, and you shall see me make tests."

At this juncture the little Indian boys and girls began to pour out of the big red dormitory like a stream of blue gingham. They spread over the playground to the number of several hundred, making a scene of color and animation. Several little boys came along to peer through the wire fence at Nophaie.

Nophaie also observed that two of the schoolteachers were out on the grounds with the children, but did not approach near enough for Nophaie to recognize them. Then Mrs. Wolterson appeared, coming into the garden, wearing gloves and carrying a trowel.

Then Nophaie saw Marian leading a little Indian girl toward them. The two teachers were watching Marian. And Nophaie, with his sharp eyes, caught a glimpse of a woman's face in a window of a house across the avenue. This appeared a busier thoroughfare now.

"Shore," drawled Wolterson, with eyes on the avenue, "and here comes the champion liar of the reservation."

Nophaie saw a heavily built young man, roughly clad, swinging with rider's gait up the avenue. Upon sighting the group in the garden he swerved and, tilting back his sombrero, he lounged against the gatepost. His face was brown and broad, with thick lips and prominent eyes.

"Howdy, folks!" he said with a slow grin. "You ain't really workin'?"

"Howdy, Jay!" responded Wolterson. "I don't get much time except of evenings."

"Why, you seem to have all the time there is," returned the other. "And look who's here—the handsome Mrs. Bob. I calculate to find me a wife like her."

"Jay Lord, you're a sad flatterer," observed Mrs. Wolterson.

"Sad? I reckon not. I'm gay," he replied, and sauntered into the garden. His bold gaze fell upon Nophaie, and he addressed him in Nopah.

"Say, ain't this the college Injun?" he inquired of Wolterson, seeing that Nophaie paid no attention to him. Then Lord espied Marian, who had come up to the fence, leading the little Indian girl. Mrs. Wolterson went over to them, answering Marian's greeting. Lord doffed his sombrero and waved it low.

"I reckon I'll hang round awhile,"

he said, as he approached the fence and hung over it. "Why, who's this here little girl? Aren't you an Injun?"

"I'm not," piped up the little girl in astonishingly good English; "I'm Miss Evangeline Warner."

"Ho! Ho! Listen to the little Injun girl," replied Lord, with a loud laugh.

"Jay, please don't tease Eva," asked Mrs. Wolterson.

Nophaie had heard of this three-year-old prodigy. Her Indian mother had been glad to get rid of her, yet showed great pride in Eva's fame. For some strange reason the child, who was a full-blooded Indian, had taken remarkably to the white people's language and ways, and after two years hated the very name of Indian. She was a sturdy child, with heavy round face and straggling black hair.

"No, I'm not—I'm not," declared Eva vehemently, and she kicked at the wire fence.

"Never mind, Eva," said Mrs. Wolterson, as she knelt down to take the little girl's hand. "Say your go-to-bed prayer for us."

Evangeline appeared wholly devoid of the shyness characteristic of Indian children.

"Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I should worry!"

Jay Lord roared with laughter, and Wolterson, too, enjoyed a laugh. Before Marian could protest, a loud voice rang out from behind:

"Shut that brat's mouth!"

"Come Eva," said Marian hurriedly and, rising, she led the child away.

"That sounded a heap like the Old Book, now didn't it?" rasped out Morgan, glaring about him.

Nophaie saw a matured man of medium height, thick-bodied, with something slack in his physical make-up. He had a smooth face, pale eyes, and a long, thin-lipped, tight-shut mouth. He had a big nose, somewhat of a reddish hue, and his complexion was an olive-tan, rather than the healthy bronze peculiar to the desert. All about him breathed of intolerance.

Jay Lord was the first to answer Morgan. "Sounds like one of them schoolmarms, to me."

"Mr. Morgan, I'm sure Marian could never have taught Eva that," interposed Mrs. Wolterson. "Why, she was shocked! So was I."

The missionary might not have heard her, for all the sign he gave. "Wolterson, the agent tells me you drove Gekin Yashi home this morning."

"Yes, sir," replied the stockman.

"How come?" jerked out Morgan.

"Wal," drawled the Texan, "if you mean what did I have to do with it—Blucher gave Gekin Yashi permission to visit her father. I am dipping sheep out at Do etin's. Had to haul supplies this morning. Gekin Yashi rode on the wagon. That's all."

"Humph! When's she coming back?"

"I don't know. She said she hoped her father would keep her home."

When Morgan's restless glance fell upon Nophaie it became fixed. Nophaie met that glance. Leisurely he rose to his tall stature, and folding his arms he gave Morgan eye for eye.

"Are you the college Indian?"

Nophaie did not feel that he was required to answer.

"Sure he's the one," put in Jay Lord. "They call him Nophay or somethin' like."

"Can't you speak English?" demanded Morgan sharply. "Let's hear some of your Eastern lingo."

"I would not have to speak English very well to do it better than you," replied Nophaie.

"Wha-at?" blurted out Morgan.

Nophaie eyed him and did not vouchsafe any more.

"Have you ever been to my church?" went on Morgan.

"No."

"Well, then, I want you to come."

"What for?" queried Nophaie.

"To hear me preach. If you speak English as well as you brag, you can carry the word of God—of Christianity—home to your heathen tribe. Teach them how to get to heaven."

"We have no desire to go to your heaven," returned Nophaie. "If there really is such a paradise as you preach about, all the land there will be owned by missionaries. And the Indians would have none to grow their corn and hay."

"You think you're smart, don't you?" snarled Morgan.

"Morgan, the most stupid Indian on this reservation is smart enough to see through you."

"Bah! Your tribe of gut-eaters are too ignorant to see anything, let alone the white man's religion."

"The Indian's own religion is infinitely better for him than the white man's."

"Humph!" fumed Morgan. "Did you learn that at college?"

"No. I learned it upon my return to my people. What is more, I learned there is not one single real Christian Indian on the reservation, and it is your own fault."

"That's a damned lie," shouted Morgan.

"What do you know of the Indians out there?" demanded Nophaie, pointing to the desert. "You have never been out there in the desert."

Slowly the color left Morgan's face. "What do *you* think you know of me?"

"Only what the Indians say—and what I can see."

"I have been missionary here for over fifteen years. The Nopahs are harsh. They are slow to appreciate my work."

"No, Mr. Morgan," retorted Nophaie, "you have it wrong. My tribe has been *swift* to appreciate your work. Don't try any of your religious talk on me. It is all bunk. You are not a true missionary."

"Insolent heathen!" ejaculated Morgan, choking so that the thick folds of flesh on his fat neck worked up and down.

"If you were a real man you might help the poor Indians like a real missionary would do. You might teach them better ways to build, cook, harvest, irrigate, shear their sheep, and store their corn. You might teach them sanitary laws. By improving their physical condition, you might raise their moral standards. But, Mr. Morgan, you are not a builder. You are a destroyer, and not only of the Indians' faith, but of the toil and sacrifice of true missionaries of God."

"I—I'll put you in jail," Morgan raged at him.

"What for? Telling the truth?" rejoined Nophaie in scorn. "This is a free country. I am an American. An honest Indian!"

"I'll haul you up for this," he threatened, lifting a shaking hand.

Swift as light Nophaie leaped out of his statuesque posture, so suddenly that both Morgan and Lord recoiled.

"Haul me into court!" returned No-

phaie piercingly. "Haul me before your investigation committee! I would like nothing better. I will have Indians there, and *real* white men to listen. Do you get that, Mr. Morgan?"

But Morgan shirked an answer, and with somber glance sweeping away he drew Lord with him and passed out of the gate, down the avenue. Lord's voice, low and hoarse, came back on the breeze.

Thereupon Nophaie turned to Wolterson and his wife. The Texan's habitual calm appeared to have been broken.

"Shore, you gave him hell," he said, breathing heavily. "You could have knocked him down with a feather—and me, too. About the happiest few minutes I ever passed in Mesa!"

But Mrs. Wolterson appeared pale and distressed. "Oh, he was furious!"

"Morgan is a coward and liar. I wonder that some Indian has not killed him long ago," said Nophaie. "It proves the patience and the restraint of my people."

"Nophaie, I've lived among violent men," rejoined the Texan soberly. "Don't underrate Morgan. He's been long in power. He's arrogant—malicious. I'd put nothing beyond him."

It was long past dark when Nophaie reached the hogan of Do etin. A fire still burned and in its flickering light sat the father of Gekin Yashi, a man little beyond middle age, stalwart, deep-chested, with massive head and great eyes.

Nophaie saw that he had been expected. Bread and meat and drink were tendered him. While he ate hungrily his host smoked in silence. Nophaie looked round in the shadows of the hogan for Gekin Yashi and her mother, but they were not there.

By and by Do etin broke his silence. He gave his consent for Gekin Yashi to go with Nophaie and approved of that procedure. But he doubted it would be possible to hide his daughter for long. Nophaie should not at once incur risk of punishment by marrying Gekin Yashi or letting it be found out that he had hidden her away.

Do etin went on to tell of the confessions made to him by Gekin Yashi—of Blucher's enmity toward her father—of Morgan's haranguing at her—of the matron's forcing upon her menial labors when she should have been in school—of brutality to the Indian children—how all the milk and fruit, which should have gone to the children, was used by Blucher and his associates.

Nophaie brought the information of Blucher's new ruling, which meant that the Indian girls must go to Morgan's chapel to hear him preach.

Do etin showed intense passion and vehemence. "Never shall Gekin Yashi go to Morgan!"

"Do etin, we are in the power of white men," Nophaie said earnestly. "But there are good white men who believe in justice to the Indian. There are many good missionaries."

"The sun of the Indian's day is setting," replied Do etin, mournfully. "We are a vanishing race."

In the clear, cool gray dawn Nophaie waited out on the desert for Gekin Yashi, as had been planned.

Eastward the dim light on sand and shrub lifted to the long blue wall of rock that cut the plateau, and above it flared the pale gold herald of sunrise. The desert was as still as death. Nophaie waited, at last fixing his gaze down the gradual slope at a point

where Gekin Yashi must appear. She came into sight, a slim dark figure on a gray mustang.

The sun rose, now shining upon Gekin Yashi's raven-black hair, upon the face that was like a dark flower. Two months had changed Gekin Yashi. And never had he beheld her in other than the blue gingham uniform of the government school. She wore now the velveteen and silver and beads and buckskin common to her tribe. As she reined in the little mustang beside Nophaie her dusky eyes flashed one shy glance at him; they were dropped under dusky lashes. Her bosom heaved.

"Daughter of Do etin, listen," said Nophaie. "Nophaie has come back to help his people. He is Do etin's friend. He loves Gekin Yashi, but as a brother. He will take Gekin Yashi far into the white-walled canyons, to the Pahutes, and hide her there. And always he will be her brother."

Nophaie rode away with Gekin Yashi to the northward, avoiding all trails, hiding as best he could their tracks, searching the desert with keen eyes for Indian riders he wished to avoid. As sunset came he turned to the hogan of a Nopah he could trust.

Next day the black slopes of Nothsis Ahn loomed on the horizon. Gekin Yashi gradually found her voice and came at last to talk to Nophaie. Thus he had opportunity to study the effect of the government school upon an Indian girl. Most of what she had learned was good. When she went back to her home and married, to have children of her own, she and they must certainly be the better for her schooling.

In three days Nophaie reached the Pahute camp under the brow of Nothsis Ahn, believing that the few Indians to whom he had trusted Gekin Yashi would keep her secret. It cost him all his sheep to engage these Pahutes in Gekin Yashi's service. They could not leave their range and go into the deep canyons for an indefinite period without being well paid for it.

Chapter Ten

Master of the Nopahs

FROM the hour Nophaie gave up his sheep to the Pahutes in payment for their care of Gekin Yashi he became a nomad—a wanderer of the sage. With responsibility removed from his life, he was no longer tied to his lonely upland home.

A few rides from hogan to hogan showed Nophaie that his status among the Nopahs had undergone a remarkable change. Not at once did he grasp what it was to which he must attribute this. At Etenia's home, however, the subtle fact came out in the jealousy of Etenia's daughter—she and all the Nopahs had learned of his abduction of Gekin Yashi. Etenia swore there was not one Indian in all the tribe who would betray Gekin Yashi.

"Nophaie will marry Gekin Yashi now," concluded Etenia, and all his enmity seemed gone. He honored Nophaie and feasted him, and had his braves sit round the hogan fire and sing the beautiful Nopah legends of love and courage.

Nophaie was powerless to correct this impression that had gone abroad. All Nopahs, and Pahutes, too, took it for granted that the Little Beauty was destined to be Nophaie's wife.

Nophaie rode far to keep his next appointment with Marian at Mesa, and

for the whole hour of their meeting he talked of the change that had come through his taking Gekin Yashi away from the power of the missionary.

"Nophaie, now your great opportunity has come," she said. "You can be a power among your people. But keep secret—that their faith is not yours."

"I will," he replied.

"Now let me talk—for soon I must go," said Marian.

"No one suspects you. All they know at the agency is that Gekin Yashi has disappeared. Blucher did not care. But Morgan was furious. And Do etin thrilled me—so calm, so somber and aloof, before those men. He answered every question put to him, yet he seemed not to lie!

" 'Do you think she ran off?' demanded Morgan.

" 'Yes,' answered Do etin.

" 'Where?'

" 'Gekin Yashi's tracks led north off the road to Mesa—and disappeared in the sands.'

" 'You'll help us find her—get her back?'

" 'No.'

" 'Yes you will!'

" 'Do etin will die before he hunts for Gekin Yashi.' "

"Marian, Do etin said as much to me," returned Nophaie.

"Oh, I fear for Do etin," cried Marian. "They will do him harm. After Do etin left, Morgan ordered me out of the office—pushed me out and slammed the door. I heard him say: 'Blucher, when we find this Indian hussy you've got to enforce that rule. And if Do etin doesn't put his thumb mark on my paper it'll go bad for him—and you'll get the steam roller!' Blucher replied, 'The hell you say?' And Morgan yelled back, 'Yes, the hell I say!' Then they quieted down and I could not distinguish what they said, but they were talking for a long time. I think you ought to advise Do etin to move to the very farthest point on the reservation."

"He would not go a step," replied Nophaie.

He returned by way of Red Sandy, where at the trading-post he was surrounded by Nopahs he had never seen before and made to realize his importance. The trader there was buying wool at fifty cents a pound and complaining about the scarcity of it. The Indians did not need money. They were not making any blankets. Nophaie was struck with the evidence of prosperity and independence exhibited by these lowland Nopahs.

Riding off across the sand to the northward with some of these Indians, Nophaie covered twenty miles and more before he dropped the last horseman at his hogan door. An old squaw elbowed her way out.

"Nophaie, look at Nadglean nas pah," she said with great dignity, "who tended your mother at your birth. Nadglean nas pah washed your eyes. She lives to see you, Nophaie, the Warrior. Come, feast with us."

Nophaie stayed there, keen to learn of his mother, grateful to feel stealing over him a closer touch with his people. By nightfall, when the feast was served, the hogan had no room for more Indians. They ate for hours and sang until late in the night. The occasion seemed one of honor and joy to these Indians who delighted in Nophaie's company. Many a dusky eye shone the brighter for his words.

Next morning he rode on his way, more impressed than ever before with

the prosperity and happiness of the Nopahs.

Upon reaching the upland pasture under Nothsis Ahn, Nophaie herded his horses into a band and drove them out on the Pahute trail. That night he camped down in the deep canyon with the family who lived there, finding in this remote place that his fame had arrived before him. Welcome was his in every Indian habitation. At sunrise he headed his horses up the overhanging colored slope of earth and rock, out on the cedared flats, down into the monument country, and across the red-and-yellow desert to Kaidab.

"Sure I'll buy your horses," said Withers, in reply to Nophaie's query. "What will you take for them?"

Nophaie hesitated a moment, then named a figure.

"That's not enough," replied Withers. "I'll give you five more on each horse. What'll you take—the cash or a trade?"

Nophaie took part of the deal in a new outfit for himself, which included a gun.

"Reckon that you're going to do what Blucher told Wolterson,—'ride around,'" said Withers with a laugh.

Mrs. Withers was glad to see Nophaie and was eager to hear news of Marian, but she had heard nothing of his abducting Do etin's daughter.

"Nophaie, I would like you to help us here in a little job—our kind of missionary work," she said presently. "Do you know this half-crazy Indian we call Shoie?"

"No," replied Nophaie.

"Well, he claimed to have bewitched a squaw who died. And he has told two other squaws that he means to work his spell upon them. The first one, Nolgoshie, the loping woman, got to thinking about this and fell sick. I want you to help me get Shoie to say he will remove his spell. Then ride over to Nolgoshie's hogan and tell her. The other squaw is the wife of Beleanth do de jodie. He is a rich Nopah and a good man. We want you to tell her that it's the same thing that you called Morgan's teaching."

"What was that?" inquired Nophaie curiously.

"Bunk!" exclaimed the trader's wife with a twinkle in her eyes. "That word has spread all over the reservation. I've had a dozen Indians ask me what bunk meant. You see loud-mouthed Jay Lord told it in the trading-post at Mesa, before some Indians. That's how it got out."

"I thought Jay Lord was one of Morgan's right-hand men," observed Nophaie reflectively.

"No; he's Blucher's tool. For that matter, they all hate one another. Now, will you help me to deliver these squaws from Shoie's spell?"

"I can influence this Shoie," he replied, and then briefly related what had happened in Wolterson's yard at Mesa, his interview with Do etin, his taking Gekin Yashi away into hiding, and the strange reaction of his tribe.

Mrs. Withers grew intensely animated. "So *that* was it!" she exclaimed. "I've been wondering about this sudden interest in you. Well, Nophaie,

there is no other single thing you could have done to establish a great name for yourself among the Indians."

Nophaie took some time over the selection of his outfit, especially the gun. After considerable deliberation he decided a small weapon he could conceal if desirable, or carry on his belt, would be best for him.

"Here's your man Shoie," said Withers, coming into the post.

Nophaie approached this Indian with interest and a strange, vague reluctance.

Shoie appeared to be an Indian of perhaps twenty years of age, a big-headed brave with bushy hair. His face might have impressed a superstitious squaw, but Nophaie saw it as that of a vain, sullen Indian, lacking in intelligence.

He was evidently flattered to be singled out of the group of Indians, and showed the same deference for Nophaie that had become universal. Nophaie bought cigarettes and canned fruit and cakes for him, and spent some time with him before broaching the subject of Shoie's spell of bewitchment. Shoie said these women were possessed of evil spirits which he wanted to exorcise. Nophaie at length induced him to say that he would remove the spell.

Nophaie decided at once to ride out to the hogans of these Indians and take Shoie with him. Nolgoshie, the loping woman, lived out across the desert, in a canyon that opened into the mountain mesa. Hogans were numerous under the looming wall of this upland.

Nophaie found Nolgoshie tended by female relatives or friends. Before he entered the hogan he called these women out and told his errand, indicating Shoie, who stood by, hugely alive to his importance. Nophaie thought best not to take Shoie into the hogan with him.

Nolgoshie lay on her blankets, a squaw still young and not uncomely, and for all Nophaie could tell she looked perfectly healthy. But she was sick in her mind.

"Nophaie has brought Shoie. He is outside," said Nophaie impressively. "He will take away the spell."

The squaw stared at Nophaie and then at her attendants, all of whom nodded vehemently and corroborated his statement. The effect on Nolgashie was magical. Her face lost its set, solemn gloom. Her eyes dilated and she sat up.

Nophaie talked to her for a few moments, assuring her that the evil spirit had departed and would not return. Nolgoshie grew better even while he was there.

He rode with Shoie to the far end of that pasture land, some ten miles to the westward of Kaidab. Beleanth do de jodie was at home, much concerned about his wife. She was very ill. The medicine man had done her no good. Nophaie had audience with her also, and saw at once that it was precisely the same kind of case as Nolgoshie's, only this squaw had thought herself into a more dangerous condition. Nophaie was not sure that he reached her understanding. She showed no sign of improvement. Nophaie went out to find Beleanth do de jodie pressing presents upon Shoie.

Next day a messenger arrived in Kaidab with news that Beleanth do de jodie's wife had died. This gave Nophaie a profound shock. He exerted himself in every possible way to keep Nolgoshie from finding out. In vain!

Her own attendants, in spite of advice and importunity and threats, told her of the death of the other woman who had been under Shoie's evil spell.

Nolgoshie fell back into the panic of superstitious fears. Nophaie besought her with all the eloquence and persuasion he could command. She only grew worse. Then he galloped off in search of Shoie. At last he found him, on the very moment bragging he had put back the spell upon Beleanth do de jodie's wife, and intended to do the same for Nolgoshie.

"Come back with me," demanded Nophaie, "so that Nolgoshie may hear from your own lips the spell is broken."

"No!" returned Shoie sullenly.

"You will come," replied Nophaie sharply, and he dismounted.

The Indians present, all except Shoie, rose in respect to Nophaie. An old chief put his head out of a hogan.

"Nophaie is master," he said. "Shoie is an Indian with twisted mind. He is not a medicine man. His spell is a lie."

Nophaie knocked Shoie down and beat him, and dragging him to his feet shoved him back to his horse. He forced the bleeding and frightened Indian to ride with him to the hogan of Nolgoshie. But they arrived too late to lend any light to that darkened brain. Nolgoshie was raving.

Nophaie drove Shoie off with a threat to kill him if ever again he claimed to cast a spell on an Indian. Upon Nophaie's return to Kaidab with the news Mrs. Withers expressed sorrow, but not surprise.

And next day came the messenger with news of Nolgoshie's death and that none of the Indians would bury her. Nophaie took this duty upon himself.

Chapter Eleven

The Plotters

MORGAN put some letters in a drawer of his desk and locked it. "I've got the Old Book behind me," he muttered, exultation in his voice.

He gathered together a number of typewritten pages, all soiled, with the dirty thumb marks of Indians at the bottom. These he placed in an envelope, sealed and addressed it, and placed it in his pocket, to give personally to the Indian mail carrier. Morgan never intrusted his communications to the post office at Mesa. Pondering a moment, with his fat fingers thrumming on the desk, he had an intense and preoccupied air. The furrows on his brow knit into a knot.

His office adjoined the chapel, where he preached to the Indians. Color and comfort were exceedingly in evidence. There was a significant absence of anything of Indian design. This study had two other doors, one opening into his living-room, the other out upon a back porch.

His first visitor that morning was Jay Lord. Heavy-booted, lazy-striding, he entered familiarly without removing sombrero or cigarette, and his bold face wore a smile. His dusty garb attested to recent travel.

"Howdy, Morgan!" he said. "I got back last night. Haven't seen Blucher yet. Reckon I wanted to see you first."

"Did you find out anything?" queried Morgan.

"Wal, yes an' no," returned Lord. "I can't prove what Blucher wants. Them Pahutes are sure close-mouthed. But I've a hunch the Injun Nophay had a

lot to do with Gekin Yashi's disappearance."

"So had I that hunch," retorted Morgan darkly. "Blucher didn't want to send you. He doesn't care, now the girl has been brought back. But *I* care. And I want examples to be made of Do etin and whoever rode off with Gekin Yashi."

"Reckon you'll never prove anythin' on either Do etin or Nophay," said Lord dryly. "You'll just have to frame them."

Morgan's pale eyes studied the blunt, nonchalant Lord with a penetrating, somber gaze.

"Very well," replied Morgan succinctly. "I need you. And you want to replace Wolterson. I'll see that Blucher steam-rollers him. And I'll pay you, besides."

"How much?"

"What it's worth to me," snapped Morgan. "I don't pay men before they work."

"Ahuh! Wal, we understand each other. An' is my hunch about Blucher correct?"

"What is that?"

"Wal, you wasn't particular clear, but I sort of got an idee you wanted more on Blucher, so you could steam-roll him when it suited you."

"You're no fool, Jay Lord. That's why I want to keep you here at Mesa. Now tell me why you believe this Indian had something to do with Gekin Yashi's disappearance?"

"Wal, the day after she was lost I rode across the mesa," rejoined Lord. "I found where Gekin Yashi had rode off the trail. An' I searched round till I saw moccasin tracks in the sand, an' hoss tracks. I trailed them tracks all day, till I seen they were goin' straight north. Then I came back."

"Well, go on," said Morgan impatiently. "The Nokis did as well as that."

"Sure. But it took them long to find out what I knew right off—that they'd lose the trail when they came to the sage and the flat-rock country up towards Nothsis Ahn."

"Yes, but if the Nokis lost that trail how did they eventually find Gekin Yashi?"

"Wal, I found *that* out this trip. The Pahutes who had her brought her to the camp of the Nokis. It came about this way. There's a half-nutty Nopah named Shoie. He's a spellbinder. Wal, this nutty Injun sends words by a Pahute that he had put his spell upon Gekin Yashi to kill her. He'd already killed two Nopah women with his spell. The Pahutes are more superstitious than the Nopahs. They fetched Gekin Yashi out to the Nokis who were huntin' her."

"Well!" ejaculated Morgan. "And how do you connect the college Indian with this?"

"Wal," responded Lord, "while I was up in that country I found out where Nophay had lived an' buried his relation. I finally found Nophay's hogan. I searched around for hoss tracks and moccasin tracks like them I had pictured in my mind. An' I found them, plain as print. I found clean-cut moccasin tracks on the grave of Nophay's relation. I recognized that track. An' on the way down here I asked a Nopah who buried Nophay's relation an' he said Nophay. Now, Morgan, it doesn't prove anythin', except to me. I *know* who stole Gekin Yashi away."

"That's proof enough for me," returned Morgan somberly. "Lord, you're a sharp fellow. I didn't appreciate you. We'll get along. Now, don't tell Blucher this about the Indian. Go now and do

Blucher's bidding. Keep your eyes and ears open. And see me often."

Morgan intercepted the mail carrier and safely deposited the precious affidavit of his zeal in that trusty Indian's pocket. He then wended his way up the shady avenue of tall poplars towards the agent's office. As he mounted the high porch steps he heard voices. Friel and the Warner girl! Morgan paused to listen.

"Let me alone," wearily protested the girl.

The sound of a scraping chair on the floor followed, then swift, soft steps, and a man's voice, with a quick note, rather hoarse. "Marian, don't you know when a man loves you?"

Morgan opened the door and entered. Friel was trying to enfold Miss Warner in his arms and she was thrusting him back.

"Hah! Excuse me, young folks," said Morgan. "Am I interrupting a love scene?"

"You are not!" cried Miss Warner hotly, now jerking free of Friel. Her face was red. Her dark blue eyes blazed.

"What was it I interrupted, then?"

"Mr. Morgan, you can judge for yourself," replied the girl.

"Attack, I suppose," interposed Morgan, as the girl paused breathless.

Friel confronted Morgan in suppressed agitation. "See here, Morgan, you're at your old trick of framing someone," he rasped out.

"Miss Warner, this is serious, but I acquit you of blame," said Morgan, paying no attention to the irate Friel. "Where is Blucher?"

"He went to the dormitory to consult Miss Herron."

"Please go for him. Don't mention this unfortunate—affair. Leave that to me. I'll see you are not attacked again." When Miss Warner had gone he turned to the other man.

"Friel, this is a serious charge."

"Trump it up! Hatch something! Frame one of your damned tricks!" exclaimed Friel in low, hoarse passion. "I'm honestly in love with that girl. I want her to marry me. You interrupted my love-making—that and nothing more!"

"Friel, I'd like to believe what you say," replied Morgan caustically, "but Miss Warner's plain talk proves you're either a liar or out of your head."

"It was her temper, I tell you! She knows I didn't mean her harm," protested Friel.

"Suppose I call an investigation by the mission board? If Miss Warner testified to her convictions and if I told what I saw—you would be rather seriously involved, now, wouldn't you?"

"Investigation!" Friel echoed slowly. "You wouldn't call one on me?"

"I've been your friend here. I've kept you here on the reservation. This behavior of yours is not becoming to a missionary. And your ranting at me did not sound like music to my ears. I might call an investigation by the board."

"You *might*," returned Friel sarcastically. "Which means you won't just so long as I stand hand in glove with you?"

"Precisely. You remember that little irregularity of yours concerning the testimonials—the thumb prints of Indians who didn't know they were signing away their land and water right? For land you now have a patent to?"

"Yes, I remember—and most decidedly I remember the idea did not originate wholly in my brain."

"That you cannot prove," replied

Morgan tersely. "So I think you'll be wise to stand on my side of the fence. Here comes Blucher. Not a word of this!"

Morgan locked the door of Blucher's private office. He did not need more than sight of the agent's face to see that the German's twist of mind was at work.

"What's the trouble?" asked Morgan.

Blucher's gray-blue eyes dilated. "What's *your* trouble?" he queried, with a laugh. "You're stewed up, same as I am."

"Don't talk so loud," replied Morgan, with a significant look and motion at the door of Miss Warner's room. "I don't trust that girl. My Noki says he saw her at the Castle Rocks talking to our college Indian. It was that educated Nopah who stole Gekin Yashi from the school."

"Who told you? How do you know? What—"

"Never mind how I get my facts. I know. That's enough."

"But what *you* know doesn't satisfy me," returned Blucher testily. "I like Miss Warner. She's a fine girl. I can't see one fault in her. What's more, she's a great help to me. I'd miss her."

"I'm not suggesting you get rid of her," rejoined the missionary. "If she's valuable, get all you can out of her—until we know for sure. And meanwhile be cautious."

"How're we going to know for sure? We've read some of her letters. But they didn't prove anything to me. I think you're overcautious."

"Not me. Those letters of hers gave me an idea. She lived in Philadelphia and spent her summers at the seashore. She wrote of seeing baseball games there. Now I've learned that our college graduate was one of the most famous athletes the Eastern colleges ever developed. Well, I'm wondering if Miss Warner might have known him in the East. I'll write to my Philadelphia friend and ask him for more information, especially if this Nopah played baseball at the seashore."

"Why not cut straight to the heart of a problem?"

"It's never wise to show your hand."

"Let's not waste opportunity. I'll have Miss Warner in here," replied Blucher.

"All right. Fetch her in. But let me question her. I'll take a chance."

Blucher, unlocking the door, opened it and called, "Miss Warner, please step here."

She came in, quiet, composed. Morgan fixed his cold, icy gaze upon her face.

"Miss Warner, do you deny you're a friend of Nophaie—that you meet him secretly?"

The girl's golden tan seemed to recede, leaving a clear pallor on cheek and brow. A quick breath escaped her.

"Mr. Morgan, am I to understand that I am a hireling to whom you are privileged to put such personal questions?"

Morgan made a slight motion of his hand, as if for Blucher to dismiss her. Manifestly he had been answered to his satisfaction.

"*Do* you deny?" interposed Blucher.

"I would not deny any implication whatever made by Mr. Morgan," returned the girl loftily.

"Very well. That will do," said Blucher, waving her to the door, which he closed and locked after her.

Morgan signed him to draw a chair closer, and he whispered, "It's more

than I suspected. She meets the Indian. Maybe she's in love with him. Absolutely she's not what she seems."

The agent stroked his chin and gazed at the missionary.

"Morgan," he said, "I don't believe what you think about her."

"I usually find what I look for," rejoined Morgan. "Let's drop Miss Warner for the present. How about the Wolterson case?"

The agent unlocked his desk and produced letters and papers. "Wolterson is about ready for your steam roller," he said grimly. "All my reports have gone through. Here's a copy of a letter to Wolterson from Commissioner Salisbury."

Blucher spread a paper covered with handwriting in lead pencil and he read:

"ROBERT WOLTERSON

Through Supt., Mesa Indian School.

"SIR:

"Reports indicate that your services as stockman are not satisfactory; that you lack energy and initiative; that you boast you can make a living without work; that you are wholly inattentive to your duties and have no interest in the welfare of the Service; that you spend your time in idleness, loafing around your quarters, at different traders' stores, or taking pleasure trips; that you almost invariably remain in bed after the other employees are at their work; that you have neglected the agency stallions, which were in your care, to such extent that one of them died; and that through your negligence a young heifer recently died.

"You will be given ten days from the receipt of this letter to show cause, if any, why you should not be transferred or dismissed from the Service. Your reply should be submitted through the Superintendent within the time specified.

Respectfully,

OTTO SALISBURY."

"Humph!" ejaculated Morgan. "What was Wolterson's reply through you?"

"It's too long to read. Take this copy with you. One thing sure, Wolterson makes a strong case, and just about proves it. More than that, he has bobbed up with influential friends in Texas, one of them a Senator. The best we can expect is that Wolterson will be transferred to some other point on the reservation."

"That will do. What we don't want is an investigation out *here*. Wolterson is sharp enough to get that college Indian down here, with a lot of Nopahs who know things. I think we need to make further charges against Wolterson. I suggest you involve him in this kidnaping of Gekin Yashi."

"It won't be necessary. Wolterson will be through here when I approve this transfer. I advised his dismissal, but evidently that was a little strong."

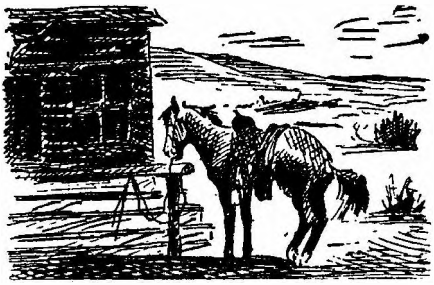
"So much for him," mused Morgan. "Before we get on to the Do etin case let's thresh out this matter of the Indian young men getting into the girls' dormitory at night."

"Isn't that my affair?" queried Blucher. "Are you superintendent of this school and reservation?"

Morgan's reply was a silent study of the face of the agent.

"I got the truth of it," slowly began Blucher. "I believe Miss Herron had something to do with those Indian youths stealing into the dormitory."

Morgan showed amaze and skepticism. "I gave Miss Herron the responsible duty of looking after the moral welfare of the girl students."



"Bah! What you mean is that this particular matron was put in her job by you. Therefore she is responsible to you. Responsible to *you*, yes, for the moral welfare of these Indian girls—and for accurate record of what goes on, so that *you* could be kept posted."

"Yes," returned Morgan, sharply. "*I* am responsible for Miss Herron. And any word breathed against her must be substantiated with facts."

"Facts? Well, the first fact I established is that this night-visit business has been going on for a long time."

"How long?"

"Ever since you first evinced interest in Gekin Yashi," returned Blucher significantly.

"So? Then say about six months."

"Yes. And you know how Miss Gale started the investigation by telling us Gekin Yashi had run to her room for protection. This happened only a few days after Gekin Yashi was brought back to the school. Now Gekin Yashi told me that several times before she left the school she had to run to *Miss Herron* for protection. Funny, now, that your conscientious matron did not report that to the superintendent?"

Morgan stared at him without speaking.

"Morgan, I suspect that Miss Herron did not lie awake at nights praying for the protection of Indian girls—especially Gekin Yashi. I know beyond a doubt that Miss Herron was glad when Gekin Yashi disappeared. Also I know from Miss Herron's own lips that she strongly disapproves of the rule making it compulsory for the Indian girls to go to your chapel. Are any of these facts illuminating to you?"

"Not particularly," returned Morgan with a heavy expulsion of breath. "But the goings-on of these young Indians prove they are heathen and will stay heathen until they are Christians."

"Which will be never," declared the superintendent.

"I have many converts," the missionary declared haughtily.

"Morgan, your converts are illusions of your fertile brain," said the German contemptuously. "You show a paper to an Indian. You pretend to read what is not there. And you get his thumbprint on your paper and send it to your mission, your church."

"Blucher, what you think of me and what I think of you are not the issues at present," said Morgan deliberately. "By and by we are going to clash. But just now we've serious business that necessitates unity."

"Yes, I know," grunted Blucher, "and I hate to get down to it."

"If you don't make examples of Do etin and Nophaie your authority on this reservation will absolutely cease," declared Morgan.

"Damn that old Indian!" exclaimed Blucher with sudden passion. "I will make him consent to that rule or—or—"

"You'll never make him do anything," interrupted Morgan. "You don't know Indians. Do etin will keep his word. He'll never consent to Gekin Yashi coming to my church."

"I don't blame him a damn bit for that," retorted Blucher brutally. "But

Gekin Yashi is not the point with me. Do etin has bucked me. He has opposed me. He will make me look weak to all the Indians. But how to make an example of him!"

Morgan leaned forward to whisper tensely. "Send Rhur, the policeman, Glendon and Naylor, at night to arrest Do etin. Do etin will refuse to consent to the new rule of the government. He will resist arrest."

"For once we agree," said Blucher in reply. "And how about the college graduate?"

"Leave him to me!"

"Then it's settled," replied Blucher.

"Send your men after Do etin tonight," added the missionary.

"Yes, the sooner the better. And that compulsory rule goes into effect right now."

Morgan hurried across the wide avenue to his house. In his study sat the Indian whom he had expected—Noki, a slim, tall, very dark man with straight black hair, and eyes of piercing sharpness. This Indian's latest service to Morgan had been the bringing back of Gekin Yashi.

"Noki, tonight you pay your full debt to the white man of God. Go to Do etin's hogan. Be there just at dark. Let the Indians see you, but not the white men who come. Watch these white men go into Do etin's hogan. Steal close and listen to what they say. Trust to the darkness. Listen to that council. Remember every word you hear. And watch—see every move. When the white men go away you hurry back to me."

For a long time after the Indian had left Morgan sat motionless in his study, locked in thought, his brow a congested mass of furrows. At last he arose, muttering, half aloud:

"That for sure puts the skids under Blucher."

Chapter Twelve

The Promise

NEXT morning while at breakfast, Morgan had a caller—the old man who had been the government farmer at Mesa for years.

"Mr. Morgan, the Nokis down at Copenwashie are raisin' hell with me," he began.

"Yes? What for?"

"It's a dry season. All but two of the springs have failed. The Nokis haven't enough water for their alfalfa. Friel gets the water first for his land. That's what the Nokis are sore about. An' I'm sayin' they've got reason!"

"Why do you come to me? I deal with the souls of Indians, not their water rights."

"Wal, Friel's deals are mostly with their water rights," replied the farmer bluntly. "Now my stand is this. The Nokis are industrious farmers. They've worked hard on that alfalfa. An' I don't want to see it burn up. Friel said what he did was none of my business. I want the Indians to have more of the water that belongs to them."

"Belongs to them? How do you figure that."

"The Nokis were here before either the Nopahs or the whites."

"That's nothing. The water belongs to the government. And Mr. Friel has a patent on land and water *from* the government. I couldn't do anything, even if I wanted to."

"Friel has no horses suffering for

hay or water. He *sells* his hay. The Indians need good hay and plenty of water. These Nokis freight supplies from Flagerstown. That's how they earn their living. They're not gettin' a square deal."

"Go to Blucher," replied Morgan.

"I just left him," returned the farmer. "He wasn't interested—sent me to you. I reckon he was upset by his men havin' to kill an Indian last night."

"That so? I hadn't heard," rejoined Morgan.

"Wal, it was owin' to some new rulin' or other Blucher ordered," went on the farmer. "Do etin refused to obey, as I heered the story. When Rhur with his deputies, Glendon and Naylor, tried to arrest Do etin he fought—an' they had to kill him."

"That was unfortunate," said Morgan, gravely shaking his head. "But Indians must learn to obey."

"Mr. Morgan, would you be good enough to have Friel ease up on the water?" asked the farmer earnestly. "He's usin' more than he needs. An' we haven't had a lot of rain at Copenwashie."

"No. Such a request from me would imply that I shared your opinion as to Mr. Friel's wastefulness, which I don't."

"Ah-huh!" ejaculated the government man, and abruptly turned on his heel. His heavy boots thumped on the porch.

In the course of the day Morgan heard many versions of the killing of Do etin. He read Blucher's brief statement to the officials at Washington; he asked for the distressed Miss Warner's knowledge of it; he heard Rhur tell how it had happened, and also Glendon. He showed grave concern as he met the stockman, Wolterson, and asked what he had heard about it. All stories were substantially the same.

Late that day Morgan received the Noki spy in his study, the windows and blinds of which were closed. And peering down into the dark, inscrutable face of this Noki who hated Nopahs, Morgan heard a long story, told with all the singular detail of an Indian's subtle and faithful observance, a story strangely and vastly different from all the others concerning Do etin's tragic death.

It was again night, and one of those nights set for the Indian girls selected by Morgan to come to his chapel to hear him preach. He had acquired a use of their tongue sufficient to make his meaning clear.

He harangued at the still, dark faces. "You must learn to obey me. Your people are too old to learn. They are heathen. Their God is no good. Their religion is no good. Your parents have no chance for heaven. They are steeped in ignorance and sin. They will burn forever in Hell's fire.

"Most of the things you do and believe now will send you straight to Hell when you die, unless you take my religion. You Nopahs think if you can put on bright clothes so you will appear fine on the outside you are all right. For this you are going straight to Hell!

"You must forget the songs and the legends and the prayers of your people. Indians must accept the white man's way, his clothes, his work, his talk, his life, and his God. Then some day the Indians will become white in heart."

Thus the missionary preached for an hour to those still, dark faces. Then he dismissed his congregation, but at the door of the chapel he drew one Indian

girl back.

"Gekin Yashi—you stay," he said, as he held her. "I will preach to you alone, so you can spread my word to your sisters."

She was trembling as the missionary led her back from the door. Suddenly he pushed her into a seat and towered over her.

"Gekin Yashi, do you know your father is dead?" he asked, in harsh sharp voice.

"Oh—no, sir," she faltered, sinking back.

"He is. He was killed last night—killed because he fought the white men who went to arrest him. But it was sin that killed him. He would not obey."

The missionary paused. Gekin Yashi's face set in a strange, dull expression of fear, bewilderment, and misery. Then her dark head drooped.

"You ran off to the Pahutes," went on the missionary. "Who took you?"

Gekin Yashi made no answer.

"It was Nophaie! He will be shot the same as your father—unless you confess your sin—and then accept my religion. Speak! Did Nophaie take you away?"

"Yes," she whispered. "But Gekin Yashi has not sinned. She is like the white girl Benow di cleash."

Then the missionary thundered at her: "Yes, you have sinned! You are all sin! Only the Word can wash you clean. Bid me speak it—pray for you to Jesus Christ. I will save you from the ice-pits and the fire-caves of Hell. Tremble in your fear!—Fall on your knees, you daughter of heathen! Love me—the white man of God! Promise to do what I tell you!"

The Indian girl lifted her face.

"Gekin Yashi—promises," she breathed, almost inaudibly.

Chapter Thirteen

"I'll Live With You."

AUTUMN days wore on close to winter—wonderful keen, clear days with the desert imperceptibly changing its hue. At night the wind moaned in the poplar trees. By day the sun shone in a cloudless sky, blazing over the desert, a flooding, all-embracing light.

No more did Marian ride out to Castle Rocks. No more did she have the thrill and joy of meeting Nophaie. Neither he nor she had any proof that his life was in danger, but they suspected it, and they knew his liberty was threatened. Nophaie had entrusted one letter to Withers and another to a Nopah sheepherder, both of whom delivered these missives through Wolterson.

A note of despair and of love rang through Nophaie's wild words, troubling her soul, yet somehow they were inexpressibly sweet. Separation made him desperate. He needed her. And Marian, in her growing poignancy, longed to go to him, to be his wife. What sustained her most of all was the cry of his heart for her.

So she waited, and the weeks passed. And as they passed her experience with the Indian children widened, her knowledge of the hidden wheels of this agency machine grew by leaps and bounds. But the ideal she had cherished and the hopes she had entertained day by day burned themselves to bitter ashes.

Between her and Gekin Yashi had come a strange, cold, somber shadow. Her opportunities to be with Gekin

Yashi came now but seldom. Miss Herron's enmity was open and scarcely possible to combat. The matron was all-powerful in the school.

Moreover, Gekin Yashi no longer received Marian with gladness. She listened, but did not respond. She seldom raised her eyes. Marian wondered whether all Gekin Yashi's pathos was due to the loss of her father.

As winter approached and the war in Europe extended its claws farther and farther over the world, and especially toward the United States, Blucher leaned more to an obsession with the rights of Germany. He could scarcely put his mind on the tasks before him on the reservation, let alone solve their problems.

One afternoon a number of the government employees were in Blucher's office, the door of which stood open. News had arrived in the mail of various angles of the war, mostly favorably to Germany. The talk of the men was general, until all at once Wolterson spoke out:

"Shore, somebody ought to shoot that Kaiser."

Blucher started up as if he had been struck. He actually addressed Wolterson in German—and then, seeing how all the men stared, he grew red and blurted it out in English:

"Would you shoot the Emperor?"

"Well, wouldn't you?" drawled Wolterson.

"I certainly would not," snapped Blucher.

The Texan's reply rang out minus the drawl: "Shore, *I'd* like to."

What Blucher's reply was, if he made any, Marian did not hear, nor did she get another look at him. From that hour, however, she dated a fixed change in Blucher.

Meanwhile Marian's observations and convictions grew with the passing of time. How much she would have to tell Nophaie upon their next meeting!

Morgan was playing some devious game. Girls had been taken from the reservation, during the absence of the agent, and sent to another state to attend Bible school. Morgan had been seen repeatedly on the school fields and at the school stables, and in other isolated places, talking earnestly to enemies of Blucher.

Most significant of all was the singular fact that letters written to Washington and to the Mission Board were not only never answered, but never received by the officials to whom they were addressed. The chief of all the Nopahs, a most intelligent Indian, wrote through an interpreter a letter to Washington, telling and substantiating facts important to the government and to the reservation. No reply was ever received.

At the midweek service Morgan slapped the Indian boys who did not remain quiet while he ridiculed the beliefs of their people. Morgan often reported the children to the matron with instructions that they be punished. Marian had seen several instances of Miss Herron's punishments. She compelled children to bend forward, hands touching the floor, or to stand erect, with hands lifted high, for as many minutes as they could endure it. Not unusual was it for a girl to faint under this punishment.

One day some Indian boys ran across the porch of Blucher's house. Marian saw the agent run out, catch one of them, knock him down and kick him.

Another day, early in December, when, despite the bright sunshine, there were ragged edges of ice along

the irrigation ditches, Marian was hurrying by the cellar door of one of the storehouses. Through the door she saw two tiny Indian boys trying to assort a huge pile of potatoes. It was very cold down there in the cellar and the potatoes were covered with frost. The boys were so cold they could not speak and could scarcely hold a potato in their little hands. Marian took them to the engine room, where they could get warm. Then she reported the incident to Blucher, who insulted her for her pains.

These weeks of comparative inaction for Marian and the dearth of news from Nophaie and the apparent indifference of Blucher and Morgan to her presence as an employee of the government in no wise lulled her fears, and certainty of ultimate dismissal. The powers were intent on matters of more importance. Marian grew brooding and nervous, and was troubled by strange portents impossible to define. She felt that something was about to happen.

One morning Miss Herron, her hard face pale and agitated, came running into the room where Marian was working. The matron ran into Blucher's office, the door of which was open.

"Where's Morgan?" she asked shrilly. "I can't—find him."

"What's wrong?" queried Blucher.

"That college Indian—forced himself into the schoolroom," cried Miss Herron. "He scared me out of—my wits. He's dragged Gekin Yashi into the hall—where he's talking to her. I heard Morgan's name—then I ran out—over to his house—to tell him. Oh, that Indian looked terrible!"

"Nophaie!" ejaculated Blucher. When Miss Herron started to run out he detained her. "You stay right here—and keep your mouth shut." Then he grasped the telephone.

The shock to Marian had kept her standing just where she had been when Miss Herron entered. Shuffling, soft footsteps that she recognized as Morgan's gave her another shock.

"What—why are you here?" he demanded, entering the office.

"Shut up!" interrupted Blucher. "Morgan, there's hell to pay. Your college Indian is here—with Gekin Yashi. . . . Hello! . . . Yes, this is Blucher. Where's Rhur? . . . Not there? Where is he? Find him quick."

Blucher slammed down the receiver of the telephone and glared at Morgan.

"Morgan, that Indian is with Gekin Yashi now," said the agent hoarsely. "Your friend Herron here heard him speak your name."

"What's—it mean?" blurted out Morgan.

"I don't know, but I wouldn't be in your boots for a million," replied Blucher. "Have you got a gun?"

"No."

"Well, the Old Book won't be behind or in front of you now!"

"Lock the door," shouted Morgan, wheeling. He banged it hard. Marian heard the key turn.

Marian had a glimpse of his face as he shut the door and somehow sight of it roused her. She peered through the open door, out into the yard, toward the dormitory. A tall Indian was running fleetly toward the office.

Marian thrilled to her depths. Nophaie was running as she had seen him many a time—running with the incomparable swiftness that had made him famous. Before she could draw another breath he had reached the porch steps to mount them in one pantherish bound. His moccasined feet padded on the floor.

Then—he flashed in upon her, somehow terrible. A soiled handkerchief, folded narrow, and spotted with blood now dry, circled his brow and black hair. His eyes seemed to pierce Marian.

"I saw Morgan come in," he said. "Is he there—with Blucher?"

"Oh—yes," gasped Marian. "They're locked in. You mustn't— Oh!"

Nophaie pulled a gun from somewhere, and lunging at the locked door, he shoved his foot against it with tremendous force. The lock broke. The door swung in. Nophaie bounded across the threshold.

Marian, suddenly galvanized into action, ran after him.

Miss Herron lay on the floor in a faint. Blucher sat back in his chair, mouth agape, eyes wide. Morgan was ghastly.

Nophaie, with his right hand, held the gun low. It was cocked and it had an almost imperceptible quiver. With left hand Nophaie significantly touched the bloody bandage round his head.

"Do etin's murderers did not give me that," said Nophaie. "They came three times to find me. But they failed. It was your Noki who ambushed my trail and shot me. I have his confession."

Neither of the accused could utter a word.

"Morgan—I thought well to get Gekin Yashi's confession also—so I can kill you without the compunction white education fostered in me."

Morgan gasped and sagged against the wall. Blucher, livid and fearful, began to stammer incoherently.

"I am going to kill you both," said Nophaie.

With that Marian shut the door behind her. Then she got between Nophaie and the men, facing Nophaie.

"You must not kill these men."

"Why not? Blucher had his men murder Do etin. Morgan has murdered Gekin Yashi's soul."

"That may be true," responded Marian. "It's not a question of justice. If you shoot them you will go to the gallows."

"Yes, if I were caught. And then I would like to tell in a courtroom what these men are."

"Nophaie, you would not be believed except by a few who could not help you."

"Then I'll kill them in revenge. For Gekin Yashi—for my people."

"No! No! You are above that, too. It's only your passion. There is no *good* to be accomplished. The evil these men have done will earn its punishment. Don't kill them."

"I must. There is no justice. Your government is not honest or fair with the Indian. And all I know cries out to kill these devils. I must do it."

"But you are the man I love," cried Marian, driven to desperation by the remorselessness of his just wrath. "You are the *man*. It would break my heart if you became a murderer—a fugitive from justice—and if—if they hanged you—I'd die! My God! Nophaie, for sake of my love—for me—let these men live. Think of what it means to me. I'll marry you. I'll live with you. I'll spend my life helping your people—if—if only you—will not—spill blood."

She embraced him, clung to him.

Nophaie slowly let down the hammer of his gun. "Benow di cleash, hold this for me," he said.

Trembling, Marian accepted the heavy weapon, wondering the while what he meant to do. She began to throb and thrill. His look, his demeanor had undergone a remarkable transfor-

mation as she looked at him.

"Gentlemen, this girl of your race has saved your lives," he said. "I meant to kill you. But not even she, or your government, or the God you pretend to worship, can save you wholly from the Indian."

Then with swift violence he turned upon Morgan and shot his knee up into the man's prominent abdomen. Morgan crashed against the wall, his head struck hard, his mouth spread wide, and a tremendous expulsion of breath followed. As he sank to his knees his face grew hideous. His hands beat the air.

Next, in one bound Nophaie leaped upon the desk, and from that right down on Blucher, breaking the chair and sending the agent hard to the floor. Nophaie did not even lose his balance.

Marian could not have cried out or moved to intercept him to save her life. She was in the grip of an absolutely new and strange and terrible spell. Nophaie no longer meant to kill: he meant only to hurt. The Indian's actions fascinated her. He never made a move to strike Blucher, who was cursing in fury and terror, trying to get up! But he could not. Nophaie kept kicking him down.

Every time the German got to hands and knees Nophaie would swing a moccasined foot. He kicked and he shoved. And then it appeared he was plunging Blucher nearer and nearer to Morgan. Another kick then sent the agent hard against the kneeling missionary, knocking him over.

"Since I scorn to soil my heathen red hands on such dirty beasts as you I must resort to kicking," Nophaie told them.

And without particular violence or rancor, he kept up this game of football until both men were disheveled, bloody-nosed wretches. Suddenly he ceased. Marian saw then that Miss Herron had revived and was sitting up. Nophaie looked at her with the same disgust that the men had inspired in him.

"I ought to kick you too," he said. "But I have a white man's education." Drawing Marian out of the room, he closed the door and took his gun from her shaking hands.

"Don't be frightened, Benow di cleash," he said, with a strong, tender arm round her. "You saved me again. I can do nothing but love you more—and go back to my canyons. Don't worry about what Blucher and Morgan will do. They are cowards. They will not speak one word of this. If you get dismissed, go to the trader's house. I beg of you—stay on the reservation yet awhile. Send me word through Withers. Good-by."

"Oh, Nophaie!" cried Marian, trying to find her voice.

He glided out upon the porch, looked to right and left, and then leisurely trotted down the steps, down the path to the road. Marian saw him mount his horse and lope away.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Quest for a Lost God

DEEP in the canyoned recesses of the rock-ribbed earth, far beneath the white dome of Nothsis Ahn, Nophaie established his refuge in one of the almost inaccessible niches of his Canyon of Silent Walls. He had packed supplies in from Kai-

dab and had left the post with an arrangement whereby any letters from Marian and more supplies would be sent once a month by a trusted Pahute.

Nophaie held dear to heart and conscience Marian's appeal that he would not become a murderer. And it seemed the only way he could escape spilling blood was to hide himself in the canyons, there to spend the winter months, and to wait. He had little fear of Blucher's hired policemen finding him here. The last Pahute hogan stood on the cedared brow of the upland slope, thirty miles away in an air line, three days of exceedingly toilsome travel up and ever upward out of the rocky depths.

Nophaie penetrated to the furthermost corner of one of the canyoned wings of the valley. Here where the foot of white man had never trodden, under gleaming white walls lifting to the sky, he pitched his camp.

The upland country was now in the grip of winter. Down here the grass and moss were still green, the willow and oak leaves had thinned out, yet many were left, fluttering gold in the sunlight, and the cottonwoods tenaciously clung to their autumn hues.

Nophaie had reasoned that if there was anything to help him now in his extremity it was communion with his soul, and mastery of his physical self, here in the shadow of these lonely, silent walls. If arrest for assault threatened him out there on the reservation he could not long have gone on working among his people. Besides, the wound from Noki's treacherous bullet had scarcely healed. So there were several reasons why it was well for him to hide, to be alone, to await some mystic issue which was written.

He would escape his enemies; he would be free of the cold winter that bound all Indians to their hogans; he could live in utter freedom here in this beautiful valley; he could dream and think the hours away, facing his soul, finding himself, growing away from that fierce hatred, realizing some melancholy happiness in the sweetness of love for Benow di cleash.

Nophaie's valley resembled somewhat the shape of an octopus, except that the main body was narrow and crooked and the arms extended far and winding. This body was about a mile in length, and the larger arms were much longer. A thousand undiscovered and untrodden nooks and corners, caves and caverns, cliff dwellings and canyons in miniature were lost in the intricacies of this valley. The great carved arm that cut deep into the bulk of Nothsis Ahn was a tremendous canyon in itself, lofty-walled at its head, opening wide at its juncture with the main body, crossing the valley proper to narrow again and lift its ramparts to the sky. Through this canyon ran the stream of water. Thickets of reeds and matted brush and long coarse-bladed grass made impenetrable barriers to the wilder recesses. This canyon showed most the forces of the elements and it was a wilderness.

Nophaie seemed driven to explore, to seek, to search, to climb—especially to climb for a height that was unattainable but to which he must aspire.

Rest and calm returned to Nophaie, and then the days seemed to merge into one another, to glide on and on toward a nameless and wished-for end, an unveiling of the future.

The day had been unusually warm for that time of year. At sunset, when Nophaie climbed the high cone-shaped

knoll in the amphitheater of the valley, there was still heat on the smooth rock. A partially overcast sky and an absence of wind had kept out the cool air from the mountain.

Nophaie reached the round summit and there he reclined. The overcast sky broke but slightly in the west, and that only enough to send a faint rose color to the tips of the great white towers. Through the gap to the north Nophaie saw the dim purple rim of a distant mesa. The long slow twilight was one of the strange and beautiful features of this Canyon of Silent Walls. Nophaie watched the faint rose fade and the gray shadows rise.

Before darkness enveloped the valley he descended from the knoll, walking on a long slant, sure-footed as a sheep, sliding here and there, down and down into the boulder-strewn ravine, where indeed night had fallen. There beside the stream he was halted by sounds he had not heard before—the strange croaking of canyon frogs. The unusually warm day had brought summer again to the denizens of the canyon. With the cool night wind these songs of belated summer ceased, and Nophaie heard them no more.

But that little he had heard was good for him. While he sat there on a huge boulder the night fell black. He felt the sadness and tranquillity of the hour, and realized that many such hours must be his, out of which might come some alleviation of his sorrow.

Above him the rounded wavy lines of the knolls loomed dark, and beyond them towered the canyon walls with crags against the sky. From the shadow under him there rose a sweet music—splashing and gurgling of swift water over stones. It accentuated the loneliness and silence of this isolated rent in the earth.

The silent walls, so like great eyelids full of dreams, the deep shadows, the haunting memory of the trilling frogs, the soft cool breeze, bringing breath of snow, the vast black heave of the mountain rock, and the infinite sky above—these brought a sense of the littleness of all living things, of the exceeding brevity of life.

Nophaie's emotions gradually grew deep and full. That bitter and hateful mood of the past slowly lost its hold on him. He seemed to be stripping off the clutch of a half-dead lichen from his soul. The oppression of the wonderful overhanging rocks—a sense surely that had not been Indian—left him wholly. Noble thoughts began to form in Nophaie's mind. His work left undone, his duty to his people, his responsibility to a white woman who had blessed him with love, must be taken up again as the only rewards of his life.

A hope seemed gestating in Nophaie's soul, trying to be born. More and more he felt its stirrings deep within him. It was like that fleeting conception of aboriginal man he sometimes caught when he narrowed his eyelids and looked at nature as if he were the first human to evolve. In nature was not only the secret, but also salvation for him, if any were possible.

What he yearned to reach was the God of his forefathers. This surely was a worship of nature. Scientists would not grant nature a soul. But wise as scientists were they could not solve the riddle of life.

Nophaie was at war with the intellectual forces that had robbed him of his religion. There was something in these dreaming, silent walls, these waiting, brooding, blank walls, these wind and water sculptored stone faces

of the ages. So he wondered under their shadow, he watched them at dawn, in the solemn noonday light, at sunset, and under the black canopy of night. So he climbed over them and to their summits, and high upon one to see another.

Nophaie was sitting up high in the center of the amphitheater and the hour of sunset was nigh. An intense hue of gold crowned all the rounded rims and domes that faced the west, out of which poured a glory of sunset light. High on the white towers of rock the gold was red; higher still on the snow of Nothsis Ahn it was rose.

Away across the gap of the valley, northward, loomed up the great mesa, veiled in lilac haze. Faint, soft, dying lights attended the waving slopes under the ragged crags that touched the colored sunset sky. Clouds floated there—fleecy, like wisps of coral in a turquoise sea—cumulus, creamy white, edged by silver, mushrooming in rosy columns—clouds of pearl and alabaster, and higher in the intense blue, smoky wreaths of delicate mauve and masses of burnished bronze.

Every moment then had its transfiguration. Every moment seemed endless in its gift to the recording soul. This was the living world of nature and its change was one of the elements of its marvelous vitality. All the valley was full of luminous glow, moving, changing, rays and shadows, a medium of enchantment.

An eagle, bow-winged and black against the luminosity of the sky, swept across the field of Nophaie's vision, flashing like a streak of darkened light, to plunge into the purple depths beyond the walls. It gave life to Nophaie's panorama. It gave him a strange joy. From the lofty tower above the monarch of the heights had shot downward like a thunderbolt, free, alone, beautiful, wild as the wild wind, to gladden Nophaie's sight, to add another thrill to his hope.

Nophaie turned to face the east—the sacred direction of the sun worshiper. Grandeur of the west must be reflected in the east. Rounded rocks, waved on high, billowing higher to the rims, in velvet tones of crimson and lavender, heaved to the loftier walls. Where the setting sun struck the wall faces in full light it painted them a vivid orange-red.

The Canyon of Silent Walls had been flooded with transforming hues. It shone upon a thousand surfaces of gold and red, with undertones of steps, leading up and up, stairway of the gods, to the castellated towers above. Gray towers, white towers, tinged with gold, rugged and spired, crowned this horizon wall of rock and led Nophaie's gaze onward to the south where the grand north wall of Nothsis Ahn was emblazoned with the cataclysmic scars of ages.

Of all the silent walls insulating Nophaie's valley, that was the loftiest and the most aloof, the one most calling, the wall of weathered slope of avalanche, of the green-black timber belt shining in the sun, of the pure white dome of snow. Here were the unattainable heights. Baffled and haunted, Nophaie could only withdraw his gaze down and down to the canyoned amphitheater beneath him and reconstruct in imagination this magnificent speaking wall of rock, this barrier of stone, this monument of nature, this beautiful face of the mountain of light.

Beneath Nophaie there was shade of

canyon depths—the dark cedar clumps, the blank gray thickets, the pale boulders, all growing obscure and mysterious in the purple twilight. Where the base of the lower wall began to sheer upward it was dark, carrying on its face the conformation of the western walls that cast the shadow. Darkly the wavering edge of shade stood out with startling distinctness against the deep red sunset—mirrored cliffs beyond.

As the sun sank lower the shadows of all intervening walls rose like a tide, and the radiance moved upward. There was no standing still of these contrasting bands of light and darkness. They moved and their color changed. A canyon swift swept glitteringly down from the heights, like a flying spark of golden fire, and darted into the shadows.

The red walls sheered up to those of gold, where line and regularity broke into a thousand cliffs, corners, benches, caves, a vast half-circular mountain front of rock where niches were fringed by stunted cedars and arches festooned by clinging lichens. A mile wide and nearly as high was this one wall of belted gold, rugged, jutted, jagged, buttressed, terraced, and crowned by cornice of white crags. Only winged creatures could ever rest on those towering pinnacles.

Wall columnar as the rolling lofty cloud of the sky! Nophaie gazed upward, lost in contemplation. Of all gifts the gift of sight was best. And while he gazed the sun went on with its miracle of transfiguration. This enchantment of a moment was the smile of nature.

Nophaie pictured the wondrous scene from above; he imagined he had the eye of the soaring eagle. Underneath that strong vision lay the dark

canyons, the red knolls, the golden walls, a broken world of waved bare stone. High on one of the rounded hills of rock stood a lonely, statuesque figure of man—the Indian—Nophaie—strange, pitifully little, a quivering atom among the colossal monuments of inanimate nature. He was the mystery of life thrown against that stark background of the age-old earth. Like a shipwrecked mariner on his spar-strewn sinking deck the Indian gazed up at the solid and enduring mountain.

Days passed into weeks and time was naught. The north wind roared on Nothsis Ahn and storm clouds lodged there, black, with drooping gray veils. But down in the Canyon of Silent Walls there was neither winter cold nor wind. Nophaie sought the sunny walls and dreamed in their reflected heat.

One day, from far down the canyon, pealed and echoed the call of an Indian. It startled Nophaie. He had forgotten the Pahute whom Withers was to send with supplies.

Nophaie ran. The solitude he had sought seemed to stand out clearer now, an enemy to his intelligence. Lonely canyons were abodes for barbarians, savages, Indians—not for men with developed thought.

Nophaie found the Pahute in the main arm of the canyon. He had

brought a pack mule heavily laden. Nophaie led him to his camp, and there unpacked the mule, and cooked a meal for the Indian, and learned from him that white policemen had sought him all over the reservation and had returned to Mesa. No other news had the Pahute, except that the trader at Kaidab had told him to get to Nophaie on this day.

"Jesus Christ Day," added the Indian with a grin.

"Christmas!" exclaimed Nophaie.

The Pahute left early in the afternoon, saying he wanted to get over the Marching Rocks before nightfall. Nophaie was again alone. Yet how different the loneliness now! There were packets and packages in that pile of supplies which did not bear the hallmark of an Indian trader.

Unpacking the heavier parcels first, Nophaie found that the trader had added considerable to the monthly order. Then there was a bundle of lighter weight, more carefully packed, and inside was a tag upon which was written in English, *Merry Christmas from Withers' outfit.*

Nophaie tried to be annoyed at this, but he could not. Indian or not, he could not help his feelings. It was kind of the Withers family to remember the educated Indian in his lonely solitude. Nophaie found cigarettes, matches, chocolate, raisins, a clasp knife, a little hand ax, a large piece of tanned buckskin with needles and thread, and woolen socks and a flannel shirt. Withers had guessed his needs and had added luxuries.

Then with hasty fingers Nophaie opened the smallest packet, that he somehow knew was from Marian. Inside the heavy paper was more paper, and inside that waterproof cloth, and inside this a silken scarf all neatly folded round a soft flat object. Nophaie unfolded the scarf to behold a large clean thick white envelope upon which had been written one word: *Nophaie.* Marian's handwriting! A thrill went over him.

He put the letter aside, and opened the second packet, larger, flatter, more strongly wrapped, incased in pasteboard. He expected to find a photograph and was not disappointed. But before he opened the cover out dropped an envelope containing snapshot pictures of Marian taken at Mesa with her own camera. The best picture was one of her riding the white mustang he had given her. When Nophaie opened the large envelope he saw a beautiful likeness of the fair face he loved and remembered so well. This was a fine photograph, taken in Philadelphia, probably some time after he had left the East.

"Benow di cleash!" he murmured.

When he went back to his packages he found books, magazines, late newspapers, pads and pencils and envelopes, a small hunter's sewing-kit, a box of medicines, bandages, candy, nuts and cakes, and last of all, a watch with radium numerals, and a buckskin fob decorated with Nopah buttons. She had not forgotten to include in all this loving munificence some token of the Indian. That thrilled him as nothing else had.

One by one he handled these gifts and pondered over the effect they had upon him. He might starve naked in a cave of the canyons, with nothing representative of the white race near him, but that could not change facts. He loved Marian Warner. Her gifts made him happy. The isolated solitudes of the desert were good for his soul and

body, but they could never wholly satisfy.

Chapter Fifteen

Wilderness Test

EAREST NOPHAIE:

"Greetings on your Christmas Day! I could not be happy without sending to you my greeting, and love, and my gifts. May these find you well. May they assure you at least of the constancy of Benow di cleash. I shall not be able even on Christmas Day to believe wholly in the spirit: *Peace on earth—good will to man.* Not when the one I love, whom I know is worthy, lies hidden in the wilds, persecuted by men of my color!

"If I could write you a whole volume I would never be able to crowd in all. My dismissal came quite some time after your visit. In fact, I ran the office until Blucher and Morgan came out of seclusion. Then I got the 'steam roller' all right and without my month's pay. I'm grateful for that, because it gives me an excuse to go back to the office, which I have done regularly since I came here to stay with the Paxtons. They are very kind to me, and allow me to pay my board. I help in the trading-store sometimes.

"As far as I am able to tell, nothing has yet leaked out in Mesa about that football match you had with Blucher and Morgan. I will never get over that day. Never will I trust myself again. If you were an Indian, I was a *savage.* I just swelled and tingled and burned with fiendish glee every time that you kicked one of the—footballs.

"My last interview with Blucher and Morgan was a nightmare. Blucher was poison. Morgan tried to intimidate me and drive me off the reservation. He said—but never mind what he said. The Indian police have returned from their search for you, I imagine. You will do well to lie low for awhile. There is a seething volcano under this particular part of the reservation. The Woltersons expect dismissal any day. All communication to Wolterson comes *through* the superintendent.

"I suspect that Blucher is greatly concerned about the possibility of the U. S. being drawn into war with Germany. There is indeed a grave possibility of that very thing. You will see the latest news in the papers I send. These came today with the mail carrier from Flagerstown. Read them carefully. You may be a Nopah, but you are also an American. German militarism threatens not only the peace of the world, but also the freedom. If war is declared I trust you will tell the truth to every Nopah on this reservation. For I absolutely *know* that Blucher will oppose any Indian help to the United States army. I read a letter he wrote to a German in New York. He was typing it himself and when some one called him *I read it.* If I could only have secured a copy of it or have remembered it. But I was excited—shocked. Blucher is all German.

"I have seen Gekin Yashi but once. She was in the school yard near the fence as I passed on my way here from Woltersons'. I got close to her before she saw me. Her face has altered strangely. When she espied me she *ran.* I called, but she paid no heed.

"I have no plans. I am waiting. You may be sure I'll not leave the reservation. I might be taken off, but they'll have to carry me. This winter is no

great problem. I need rest and I want to write some. Later, if nothing comes up here, I might go out to Kaidab. In the spring I hope to see you, I want you to know that I meant what I said in Blucher's office the day you confronted him and Morgan there. I would be happy to marry you and share what I have with you, and your life and work among your people. I have the means for a start. And we can work. I ask only that we spend some part of each year in California or the East. I have vanity enough not to let myself dry up in this desert air and blow away!

"I am the stronger for what has come to me out here. I never knew what light was—the wonderful sun—and wind and dust and heat—stars and night and silence—the great emptiness—until I came to the desert. Perhaps so with love!

"Somehow I will endure the long silence, for you must not risk writing me yet. I will dream of you—*see* you among the rocks. Always, as long as I live, rocks and walls of stone will have thrilling and sad significance for me.

"BENOW DI CLEASH."

Nophaie gazed at the stupendous wall of stone opposite. He could not see either of its corners or its base.

Benow di cleash loved him. She would marry him. She would share all she had as she would share his life. Live with him! Belong to him alone!

The fact was a staggering blow. Here under the accusing eyes of his silent walls he had feeling that no other place could inspire. Loneliness had augmented his hunger for a mate. Nature importuned him for her right. And suddenly Nophaie found himself stripped bare of all ideals.

Human being, man, Indian, savage, primitive beast—so he retrograded in the scale. He struggled in the throes of hereditary instincts, raw and wild, ungovernable—the imperious law of nature.

While he lay motionless on that mossy bank it seemed the elemental—the natural—the mindless automaton of living flesh must win. His body had millions of cells, each one of which clamored for its right to completion, expression, reproduction. Death to cell, organ, body, individual, but life to the species!

One terrible moment Nophaie lay there under the walls that seemed to thunder the meaning of nature. Then he sprang up to force this living body of his into exhausting physical activity that must bring subjugation of his instincts.

Nophaie ran. He leaped the brook. From boulder to boulder he bounded. Along the grassy benches, under the looming ledges, over the washes, through the thickets, up the canyon he sped with that incomparable stride of the Indian runner trained under the great masters of college athletics. Strange place for the famous athlete who had delighted the crowds—who had heard their trampling, pealing roar when he ran! The white man had trained him—the white man had educated him. But it was now the Indian nature that gave Nophaie the instinct to run away from himself.

He halted at his camp long enough to lay aside the precious letter from Benow di cleash. He did not want to soil that white paper with its beautiful and appalling words of love.

Out he ran—straight for the notch of the canyon—with wild eyes on the white-towered wall of Nothsis Ahn. No Indian had ever surmounted that wall,

But Nophaie would surmount it or perish in the attempt.

Nophaie's moccasined feet padded softly over the bare stone slope. He ran up the long wavy red mound, and from its round dome, where often he had watched the eagles and the sunset, he put his keen vision to the task of finding a way to climb the north face of Nothsis Ahn. There were a hundred intricate zigzag ascents up that mountain wall, not one of which seemed possible for man.

Down the waved knoll Nophaie ran, light and sure as a wildcat, and over the wide area of bare rock to the main base of the wall.

There he began to climb in a long slant, up the brown smooth incline, veined and striped, and around the headed corners, and back to a long slant in the other direction, up and up by these zigzag courses, to the curved and rolling rim of red, where began the vast slow heave of the white amphitheater.

Impetuosity and passion drove him. He climbed on, gradually slowing to the steeper ascent. Nophaie's detours consumed miles of travel. To and fro across the corrugated face of this mountain wall he traveled, always climbing higher.

A rare cold atmosphere, thin in oxygen, further slowed his efforts. Climbing grew hard. He no longer ran. He sweat, he burned, he panted. He saw only the stone under his feet and the gray looming towers above, still seemingly as unattainable as ever.

Along the last circling ledge of the amphitheater he worked around to the bold rugged bluff, surmounted it, and climbed into a world of cliffs, precipices, promontories, sharp and jagged and jutting in strange contrasts to the waved and heaved ascent he had accomplished. On and upward he toiled, and at last reached a point where the huge white-towered abutment joined the bulk of Nothsis Ahn. He had ascended to the white crags that stood out and up to hide all but the dome of the mountain. Nophaie pulled himself up, he let himself down, he leaped fissures, he crept along abysmal chasms blue in depth, he rimmed the base of crags, and climbed around and between them.

Out of the zone of white pillars and turrets at last! Level with the nests of eagles! Nophaie stood at the base of the weathered slope of Nothsis Ahn, the track of the avalanches, the tilted level of loose rocks; and he looked almost straight up to the green band of timber and the glistening dome of snow.

Nophaie sent the rocks sliding below him; he started the slides into avalanches. He loosened the slopes above him. He performed miracles of agility, speed, and endurance. Like the Indian masters of the legends, he consorted with eagles, bounded with the feet of the wind, and swung on the edges of the clouds.

Snow and spruce halted Nophaie, a forest of evergreens, matted and webbed into impenetrable windfalls, buried deep in the white ice of the heights. He could not go higher. At the edge of the snow line, on a gray brow of rock, he built a monument, so that it would be visible to eye of Indian from below.

In the piercing cold of that altitude, blown upon by the strong northwind, Nophaie gazed out and down upon the naked earth below. The great canyons were dark purple threads.

What Nophaie had climbed so desperately for seemed never to have

been. He had spent the forces of his nature—the physical instincts.

Long after dark that night Nophaie dragged his bruised and weary body into camp, there to crawl into his bed and stretch his limbs, as if never to move them again. Sleep and rest, for days and nights, restored his strength, yet he knew that climb had been the supreme physical effort of his life.

As the days and nights multiplied in the shadow of the silent walls Nophaie learned that the noble proof of his love for Marian was not in surrender to it. He would not drag her down to his level. Utterly impossible for him was a life among white men. That strange hope born there in the canyon had been burned out in the fire kindled by Marian's offer of love. Nature had fostered that hope. It had deluded him.

The silent walls heard Nophaie's denial—and how strange a light gleamed on their faces! Benow di cleash loved him and he must break her heart. Nature in her inscrutable way had drawn Nophaie and the white girl together; and no doubt that merciless Nature divined a union which would further her evolutional designs. Nature recognized no religion, no God. Nature desired only birth, reproduction, death, in every living creature. Love was the blind and imperious tool of Nature.

Days passed into weeks and weeks into months. Three times the Pahute came, and three times a white, thick letter stormed Nophaie's soul—yet left him stronger.

He measured the passing of winter by the roar of wind on the slope of Nothsis Ahn, by the circling back of the sun, by the earlier dawns, by the hot days and the peeping of frogs at nightfall. He lived that swiftly flying time in his simple camp tasks, in wandering and climbing as if the unattainable would one day be his, in dreaming of Marian and writing thoughts and experiences for her, in study of the nature of his stone-walled retreat.

Not until a late day of his sojourn there did he explore the one remaining arm of canyon. Three miles or more of exceedingly rough travel brought Nophaie to a point where this canyon changed its color, its height and width, its bed, its sky line, its every feature. Nophaie named it "Canyon of Gleams." Its hue was the strange one of pale marble in the moonlight; its height sheerly perpendicular and incredible; its width six feet at the base, gradually widening in V-shape to perhaps fifty feet at the top; its bed was solid, smooth, gravish rock hard as iron, worn into deep smooth ruts by the rushing stream; and its sky line was a long, even, straight lane of blue as far as Nophaie could see. The uneven stream bed gleamed, the water gleamed, the walls gleamed, the band of sky gleamed.

Nophaie penetrated this gigantic split in the vast bulk of rock until his progress was impeded by a further narrowing of the canyon and a depth of water that would make it necessary to swim if he went on. By placing a foot on each wall and hitching himself up Nophaie reached a height from which he could see that the canyon extended a long way, with increasing obstacles. Did he hear a faint roar of waterfall? He determined to swim through there some day when the water lost its edge of ice.

This Canyon of Gleams grew to have an insatiable fascination for Nophaie. He wandered there often, never to find it altogether the same. Here Nophaie

felt least the encroachment of the white man, the dominance of his knowledge, the loss of faith, the sacrifice of love, the imminence of unabatable grief.

The vast walls pressed close upon him, to give him the fear they might suddenly slip together and bury him forever in the bowels of the rock-ribbed earth. They were not dead things, these walls. Silent—always silent to Nophaie, yet full of unuttered sounds! The Indian in him was comrade of the rocks.

Spring! The water of the brook swelled and lost its green for hint of yellow; the frogs changed their peeping solemn croak and sweeter trill. The white primrose and the lavender daisy bloomed in sunny places. Blades of grass shot up as if by magic and the cottonwoods lost their gray. Nophaie grew restive. The hold of the silent walls lessened.

The day came when a loud call awoke the drowsy echoes of the silent canyon. Nophaie ran to the wide gateway between the red walls. He saw horses, mules with packs, an Indian—and then out from the shade of a cedar strode Withers, mopping his heated face.

"Howdy, Nophaie!" he said, with smile and earnest gaze. "You look fine."

Nophaie stirred to the warmth of the trader's close handclasp. He returned it and that was all his response. Utterance seemed difficult. Long had his voice been silent. Besides, Withers bore a look of intense strain. He was thinner, older.

"Come out of the sun," said Withers.

Nophaie followed him to a seat on a flat rock in the shade.

"Throw saddles and packs right here," said Withers to the Indian who had come with him. "Nophaie, where is your horse?"

"Gone," replied Nophaie. "I have not seen him for a long time."

"I figured on that and I fetched one for you."

"Withers, why did you bring me a horse?" queried Nophaie, conscious of an inward tremor.

"Because I think you'll hit the trail back with me."

"Has anything happened to Marian?"

"Sure—a lot's happened. But she's okay—well and fine."

"Withers, it's a long, rough ride here. You've got a strong reason for coming yourself. Tell me."

"*War!*" flashed Withers.

In one bound Nophaie was on his feet, transfixed and thrilling. "No!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, by God!" returned the other, and he too rose from his seat. A steel-gray flinty light shone from his eyes.

"Germany—and the United States?"

"Nophaie, you've said it!"

"Blucher—and the Indians?" Nophaie's voice was quick and ringing.

"I haven't a damned word to say about Blucher," burst out Withers passionately. "But the President and Congress have declared war!"

Nophaie recalled Marian's letters. By every right and law and heritage he—Nophaie—was the first and best blood of America. The depths of his whole soul roused to strange fierce passion.

Withers held out a shaking hand. "My son has gone," he said thickly. "Already! He did not wait for the draft."

"Draft! What is that?"

"A new law. A war law. Every young man between twenty-one and thirty-one is called to army and navy—to fight for his country."

"Will this draft affect the Indians?"

"No. They can't be drafted. But the government has appealed to all Indians to register. That means, as I understand it, an enrolling of the names and numbers of Indians—their horses and stock, so that the government can have this information for reference—for some use that is not clear to me. We're all drawn into the war—whites and Indians. But no Indian can be compelled to go to war."

"Can they go if they want?"

"Yes. And the call is strong for Indians to enlist."

"*I will go!*"

"Nophaie, you don't have to enlist. You owe nothing to the people of the United States. They have wronged you."

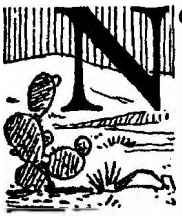
"I am an American," replied Nophaie sonorously.

"I didn't come to ask you to go to war," responded Withers in earnest passion. "But I came to tell you *this*—the Nopahs are being lied to. They do not understand the idea of registering. They are being made to believe it is a ruse, a trick to get their names, their thumb marks on paper. They are being deceived into believing this register is only another white-man lie—and if they sign they can be drafted. An old Indian said, 'Let the Germans kill all the Americans. Then we can get our land back and live in peace.' Nophaie, this tribe of yours numbers over twenty thousand. They must not be made to believe they can be unjustly driven to war. The truth must be told them. This false rumor of government treachery—this damned propaganda must not spread further."

"I will tell the Nopahs the truth," Nophaie said. "I will take Indians with me to war."

Chapter Sixteen

Recruiting Agent



NOPHAIE and Withers made a record ride to the camp of the Pahutes, where they stayed overnight. Nophaie began his work there. None of the few Pahute men present, however, came within the prescribed limits of the war demands.

Another day brought Nophaie and the trader across the upland sage to the range of Etenia. The old Nopah had sons and relatives, and more horses and cattle than any other Indian in this quarter of the reservation. It was important that he be persuaded to accede to the act Withers had called registration.

Nophaie sought council with Etenia, which was granted; and the old Indian asked the honor of the trader's presence. Nophaie had gone over in mind an exhortation he believed to be honest, eloquent, and persuasive, and which he believed would appeal to the Indians. This he delivered to Etenia with all the force he could muster.

The old Nopah smoked in silence. At last he spoke.

"Nophaie sees with the mind of the white man—far and wide. He should sit in the councils of the Nopahs. Etenia believes and will register his name. He will sell cattle and horses to the government. He will say to his sons, 'One of you shall go fight for America, for the white people, for the land where they keep us.' Etenia will say his sons shall draw lots for him who is to go to war."

That night Etenia had all his sons and relatives at his hogan in honor of

Nophaie and to hear him speak. He ordered a feast to which Withers was invited. They ate and made merry and sang. Then the old Nopah rose.

"Sons—and sons of my people—Etenia has come to many years. He has worked hard and he is rich. He owes no white man so much as a silver button. He owes no Indian.

"Our white Father at Washington has declared war on a wicked people far across the broad water where the sun rises. These wicked people are warriors. They have long worked at the arts of war—they have long made guns and bullets and powder to prepare for war. For three years now they have fought their neighbors—the white peoples who have sought to live in peace. They will win the war unless our white Father at Washington sends many young warriors across the broad waters.

"Etenia's people are asked to register—to give their names to the government—and the number of their horses and cattle. Etenia believes Nophaie and the white trader. These men are not liars. Nophaie will ride over the ranges to carry truth to those who are being deceived. Etenia will register and he tells his sons and all Indians to follow in his footsteps. He will give one of his sons to go to war with Nophaie."

Then Nophaie rose to make his address, and with ringing voice he damned the evil force at work on the reservation, and brought home to the dark, still-faced Nopahs the truth of the real danger that menaced them. He finished his speech with a trenchant statement of his own stand.

"Nophaie will go to war. Nophaie and all the Nopahs are the first of Americans. He will fight for them. And he will believe he is fighting no more for the white people than he is fighting for the Indian and his land."

When lots were drawn among the sons of Etenia it turned out that the youngest, the favorite of the old Nopah, must be the one to go with Nophaie.

"Etenia says it is well," declared the father.

At Kaidab there was a crowd of Indians, and an unrest and excitement totally new and strange to the trading-post.

Nophaie found the white people stirred and upset, under the stress of an emotion that none could control. Nophaie talked with all of them. The trader's wife showed the strain of worry, and a mother's fear for her son, and a suppressed anger and concern over the Indian situation.

The Indians were excited. They collected in little groups and talked. Every hour saw more Nopahs ride into the trading-post, and Nophaie found them sullen, distrustful, and hard to approach. He realized at once that he had been too late to influence the Indians in a body and would have a difficult task to persuade them to register, let alone go to war.

At the outset of his activities he encountered Shoie, the binder of evil spells on Indian women. Nophaie was about to pass him in contempt. But suddenly he halted. This Indian was young, strong, a keen scout, a wonderful breaker and tracker of horses. His mentality might be one to adapt itself readily to war.

"Shoie, I am going to fight for the Americans," he said in the Nopah tongue. "You are a warrior. Will you go with me?"

"Shoie will fight for Nophaie," re-

plied the Indian, with a gleam in his dark eyes.

For days Nophaie haunted the trading post and importuned the visiting Indians. His dogged efforts earned success, but nothing that satisfied him. Always he encountered the wall of doubt that, once raised in an Indian's mind, was almost impossible to break down.

The government idea of registration met with subtle and powerful check. Nophaie could not learn from any Indian just what was the content of the hostile propaganda. Nophaie decided that it would be wise for him to ride out over the reservation and head off this German propaganda.

At this juncture Nophaie received another letter from Marian, and it acted as a spur. Affairs were at white heat in Mesa—all relative to the war Nophaie must do his utmost to counteract German influence among the Indians. Marian knew he would do his noblest and then go to France to fight for his country. But he was to understand that she would come to him, if he could not come to her, before he went to training camp. And there was a concluding passage in the letter that made his blood boil in fury:

"My beautiful white mustang, Nopah, is dead! He had to be shot. Oh! it nearly broke my heart! Wolterson has been compelled to make blood tests for tuberculosis in Indian horses. He said he never would have touched Nopah. But Blucher saw my horse and *ordered* the test. Wolterson made it and reported Nopah's blood perfectly healthy. All the same, Rhur came over and shot him."

Nophaie rode out into the desert on his mission, and few were the hogans he missed. It would be impossible for him to cover all of the reservation, and he did not have many weeks before he must report for service. But he rode fast, far, and late. Most of the Nopahs in that vicinity now had heard of his stand and were ready to listen to him. Every name added to his list strengthened his cause. Slowly the list grew and with it his influence.

One after another, as the days passed swiftly, he found young braves who would be guided by him. He gave these instructions and knew they would keep their word. Grateful for their falling in line to swell his list, Nophaie rode on and on. Many a mustang he left spent at a hogan in exchange for another willingly lent him.

One afternoon near sunset Nophaie reached a small trading-post kept by a squaw-man. The last Indian Nophaie had interrogated had bidden him ride in haste to this post. Mustangs exceeding a score in number were standing haltered and loose before the squat red-stone house. But no Indians were in sight.

Dismounting, Nophaie went to the door and looked in He saw the backs and black-banded sombreros of a crowd of Indians all attentive to the presence of a white man sitting on the high counter. That white man was Jay Lord. Nophaie stole in unobserved and kept behind the Indians.

"Indians, listen," began Lord in fluent Nopah. "Blucher has sent me out all over the reservation to tell you not to register. Don't put your names or thumb marks on any paper. If you do your horses and cattle will be taken and you will *have* to go to war. This register order is not what it seems. It's an old government trick to fool you. You've been fooled before. Listen to your real friends and don't register."

When he concluded his harangue

there followed an impressive silence. Then an old Nopah, lean and wrinkled and somber, addressed the speaker.

"Let the white man tell why Blucher sends him. If the government lies to the Indians—to make warriors of them—then Blucher lies too, for he is the government."

"Blucher is a friend of the Nopahs," replied Lord. "He does not think the registration is honest. The government has made a law to *drive* young white men to war. It does not hesitate to *cheat* the Indians for the same reason."

The ensuing silence of a moment seemed pregnant with the conviction of the Indians. Presently another of them moved forward. He leaped on the counter.

"Hagoie will kill any Nopah here who registers!" he thundered.

All the Indians began to jabber excitedly. Nophaie took advantage of the moment to slip outdoors. Twilight had fallen. He walked to a corral near the house and sat down out of sight.

In twos and threes the Indians came out of the trading-post to mount their horses and ride away into the gloom of the desert. Soon Nophaie felt that he could venture close to the house. At an opportune moment he approached and leaned in the shadow of the stone wall. More Indians came out, until there appeared only a few left. Then Jay Lord came out the door with the squaw-man.

"I'm married to a Nopah squaw—shore," said the trader with a hint of wrath, "but I ain't no Indian—nor fool, either. I didn't like your talk about this register order."

"Ahuh! Wal, be damn good and certain you keep your dislikes to yourself," growled Lord. "Otherwise you won't last long here."

The squaw-man retired into his house and Lord strode toward his horse.

Nophaie glided after him, pressed his gun against Lord's side, and said low and sharp:

"Don't move your hands. If you do I'll kill you."

"Nophay?" ejaculated Lord hoarsely.

"Yes—Nophaie."

"Wal—what you want?"

"I heard your talk to the Indians. I know now what has influenced them all over the reservation. It's German propaganda—and you are Blucher's mouthpiece. Do you hear me?"

"Hell! I ain't deaf," growled Lord.

"Lord, this talk of yours is *treason*," went on Nophaie, "Do you have to be told that by an *Indian*? I'm going to war—to fight for *your* country. If you don't quit spreading these propaganda lies for Blucher I'll ride to Flagerstown and enlist. Then I'll come back on the reservation. I'll be an American soldier, outside the law. Blucher can't touch me or hold me. And I'll kill you—Lord—I swear I will! Do you believe me?"

"Wal, I reckon I do," replied Lord gruffly. "An' if you want to know, I'm damn glad to be scared off this job."

"Just the same—get on that horse and keep your back to me," ordered Nophaie.

In another moment Lord, cursing under his breath, was in the saddle. The horse plunged away to be enveloped by the darkness.

Nophaie stayed at the squaw-man's house for two days, and all his earnest talks to the Indians who visited the post failed signally to overcome the insidious poison spread by Jay Lord.

To Nophaie's dismay he found that the farther he penetrated into this part

of the reservation the colder were the Nopahs to his solicitations.

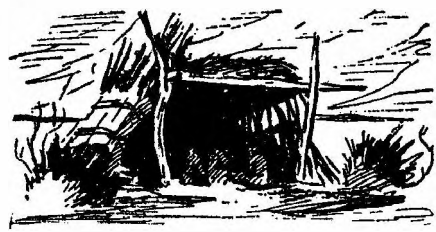
At length Nophaie headed his horse back toward the west and the country he knew best. One whole day he rode along the rim of a deep blue canyon, before he could cross. Many a day he went hungry, and slept where night overtook him.

At the Indian hogans east and south of Mesa Nophaie ran into conditions not heretofore experienced by him. Rumors had been spread all over that section—enforcement of the draft, confiscation of stock and wool, seizing of all firearms. Blucher's minions had done their underhand job well. Nophaie saw more drunken Indians in little time than he had ever seen before in all his rides over the reservation. Many were selling wool to the traders, in a hurry to dispose of it. Crowds of Indians rode into Flagerstown, to return with their minds chaotic. The medicine men predicted dire troubles for the Nopahs.

Nophaie's passionate dream of leading thousands of Indians to war had to be dispelled. His tireless labors resulted in upward of two score of Nopahs signing their thumb marks to his paper.

Nophaie saw the truth in all its appalling nakedness. He realized what might have been possible with the proud fierce young Nopahs. A great page of American history—an Indian army joining the white man in battle for liberty—would never be written. They might have made—they would have made—a glorious record, and have paid the government good for evil. Heroism for injustice! They would have earned citizenship in the United States. What magnificent opportunity lost! Lost!

"I should have killed Blucher," muttered Nophaie. "No service I can render now will ever be one-thousandth as great as that would have been."



Nophaie rode into Mesa, there to take farewell of Marian. Much as he yearned to see Marian, he was greatly relieved to learn from Paxton that she was in Flagerstown and would expect him there. She had left Nophaie a short note, telling him where to find her, and she entreated him not to tarry long at Mesa.

Nophaie made no effort to hide. Freely he mingled with the Indians at the trading-post. An unusual number were there, some drunk, all excited, and a few were bound for Flagerstown, on the same errand as Nophaie. The mail carrier had two of them engaged as passengers, and readily agreed to take Nophaie. It was a five-hour run by automobile.

Nophaie thrilled to his depths. Five hours only—then Benow di cleash! He gazed from the stone step of the trading-post, out across the sand and brush of the mesa, away over the stark and painted steppes of the desert to the unflung black-peaked range of mountains. Benow di cleash would be there.

Nophaie took no part in the jabbering of the Indians around him, but sat back behind them on the stone steps, his sombrero pulled down to hide his face. There he smoked his cigarette in silence, brooding and dark in his mind.

When school recess time came and the Indian boys ran to and fro like blue-ginghamed little automatons, Nophaie watched them from under the brim of his sombrero. What would be their future?

An automobile thrummed up the road from Copenwashie and stopped before the trading-post. Two white men beside the driver occupied it. One of them was Blucher. Nophaie felt the leap of his blood. Blucher and his companion got out of the car and climbed the stone steps, in earnest conversation not distinguishable to Nophaie.

Kill him now! The whisper ran through Nophaie's being. It was a flame. Almost it precluded thought. Could he serve his America or his own people in any better way than to kill this German? No! The face of Benow di cleash rose in Nophaie's reddening sight, and he was again master of himself.

Presently Blucher and his attendant came out, accompanied by Paxton, who appeared to be talking about flour he had exchanged for wool. Blucher stood for a moment at the doorstep. Again all the burning fires of hell in Nophaie's heart were smothered into abeyance by his love for a white woman. Just to save her pain he sacrificed the supreme and only savage lust of his life.

Once he was all Indian. How easy to kill this man! What inexplicable emotion quivered to the thought! To rise—to fling his sombrero—to thrust a gun into this traitor's abdomen—to eye him with the eye of Indian ruthlessness and white-man scorn—to free passion in the utterance: "Look, German! It is Nophaie! And your last vile moment of life has come!"

But Nophaie gave no outward sign of the storm within him. It passed, like a wind of death.

Before sunset that day Nophaie was in Flagerstown and had dispatched a note to Marian. Before he started to meet her he had enlisted at the recruiting-station and was a soldier of the United States army.

At the end of a street near the outskirts of town Nophaie found the number he was looking for. And as he mounted the porch of the little cottage Marian opened the door. Then they were alone in a little room.

"Nophaie—lover—my Indian! You are going to war," she whispered, and threw her arms round his neck.

Even as Nophaie bent to her white face and to her lips, he grasped at the meaning of her singular abandon. One word had been enough. War! And he pitied her, and loved her as never before, and understood her, and clasped her close, and kissed her until she sank against him, pale and spent.

"Nophaie—when do you—go away?"

"Tonight at ten."

"Oh!—So soon?—But you go first to training camp?" she queried breathlessly.

"Yes."

"You might not be sent abroad."

"Benow di cleash, do not have false hopes. You *want* me to go to France. I'm fit now to fight. And it will not take long to make soldiers of my Nopahs."

"That means the—the front line—the trenches—scout and sharpshooter duty—the most dangerous posts!" she cried, with a hand going to her mouth.

"Indians would not court the safe places, Benow di cleash. We are going—sixty-four Nopahs, most of whom I enlisted."

Then he told her of his long rides and his importunities to beat Blucher's influence, and of his failure.

"I knew he was pro-German," she said, with flashing eyes. "Yet strange to say he has strong friends here. Oh, this little town is out of its head. What must Philadelphia or New York be now?"

"If the Indians are excited, what must white men be?" replied Nophaie. "All this war feeling is bad, wild, terrible. But I have nothing to lose and everything to gain."

"Nothing to—to—lose," she cried, suddenly sobbing, and again her arms flashed round his neck. "Nophaie—you have *me* to lose— Don't you love me still?"

"Love you! Child, you are beside yourself," he replied tenderly. "Only today I proved my love to you, Benow di cleash."

"How? Not to me—not yet."

He told of the incident where Blucher passed within reach of his arm—at a crucial moment when all the savagery of Indian nature was in the ascendant, and he had denied it.

"Only thought of you kept me from killing him," he concluded.

"*Me!* I'd have been glad," she returned, with again that strange blaze in her eyes.

Nophaie realized that the white girl now presented a complexity of character perhaps beyond his comprehension. This war spirit had unsettled her mind.

"Nophaie, let me follow you to New York—to France," she begged.

"Let you follow me! Why, Benow di cleash—I couldn't prevent you, but I implore against it."

"I would never disobey you. Let me go. I can become a nurse—do Red Cross work—anything."

"No. If you want to obey me—give me happiness—stay *here* and go on helping my people until I come back—or—"

"Don't say it," she cried and shut his lips with hers. "I can't bear the thought. Not yet. Maybe some courage will come to me after you have gone. I love you, Nophaie. A million times more since I came out here to your country. The desert has changed me. Listen, after you leave I will go East for awhile. But I promise I will come back here and work—and wait."

"All is well, Benow di cleash," he said. "I feel that I will come back. Now let us go outside and walk. I cannot say good-by to you inside a house."

Gold and purple clouds attended the last steps of sunset—a magnificent panorama along the western slope of the mountain range. At the end of a lane a low rocky eminence rose, the first lift toward the higher ground above the town. Stately pine trees grew there. Nophaie walked under them with Marian. Strength seemed to have passed from him to her. She was growing calmer and assimilating something of his faith.

The warm summer air floated away, and the cool wind from the mountain took its place. The rosy afterglow of sunset faded into pale blue. A lonely star glimmered in the west. The great still pines grew black against the sky.

"Benow di cleash, when the Indian says at the end of his prayer, 'All is well,' he must mean just that. Your missionary never interprets any prayer as a submission to life, to nature. The white prayer is a fear of death—of what comes beyond. I have no fear of death, nor of what comes after—if anything *does* come. The only fear I

have is for you—and such of my people as Gekin Yashi.

"You must understand how gladly I welcome a chance to forget myself in a righteous war. I know the nature of fight—what violence does to the body—and if it does not kill me it will cure my trouble. Perhaps over there I may find the God I could not find in my silent canyons. Then there is the man—the Indian in me—rising up fierce and hard to fight.

"You must not have one unhappy hour on account of my going to war. Physical pain is nothing to me. I welcome this chance to justify the Indian. So I bid you not be unhappy. But be glad that with all my misfortune I can rise above it and hate, and fight for you and your people. Love of you has uplifted me to believe I may come somewhere near the noble Indian you have dreamed me."

Chapter Seventeen

Home Front

AFTER Nophaie's departure Marian felt as if the end of all had come. She had not looked beyond this last meeting. And now with the poignant and stinging experiences in the past she seemed lost and broken-hearted. She decided to go back East for a while.

The hour she arrived in Philadelphia she realized that outside of her need of change and the pleasure of old associations there was other cause for her to be glad she had returned.

Philadelphia, like other great cities, was in the throes of preparing for war. The fever of the war emotion had seized everyone. Marian found her relatives as changed as if many years had intervened between her departure and return. Each was obsessed by his or her peculiar relation to the war.

Many of Marian's acquaintances, young men under thirty, in one way or another evaded the clutch of the service. Conduct such as this was thrown into relief by the eagerness with which others enlisted.

Young women were finding the world changed for them. Marian could have found a hundred positions, all more remunerative than any she had ever had. It was a time of stress. It was a time of intense emotional strain.

Marian had her own reasons for being personally and tremendously stirred by the war. She did her bit in the way of selling war bonds, and in Y. M. C. A. and Red Cross work. But for her promise to Nophaie to go back to the reservation she would have gone, like so many young women, to extremes of war enthusiasm. The urge to go to France was hard to resist.

Nophaie's letters were few and far between, but upon them Marian lived and sustained her hope. In September she went to the seashore to get away from the humidity and tainted air of the city, which, since her sojourn in the West, she could hardly endure. And she needed rest. She went to Cape May and haunted the places on the beach where she had been with Nophaie. She bathed in the surf and spent long hours upon the sand.

So time flew by, and autumn began to decline into winter. It took time for Marian to dispose of the little property she had, and following that came a letter from Nophaie telling her when he was to sail from New York for France. Marian went to New York in

a vain hope of seeing him. But all she had of him was the sound of his voice over the telephone. For this she was unutterably grateful. The instant she had answered his "hello," he had called: "*Benow di cleash?*" Then she had listened to his brief words of love and farewell.

She was one of the throng of thousands of women on the Hoboken docks when the huge liner left her moorings. Thousands of faces of soldiers blurred in Marian's sight. Perhaps one of them was Nophaie. She waved to them and to him.

Marian returned to Philadelphia with her spirit at lowest ebb and for once in her life fell prey to an apparently endless dejection. Besides, the cold wet climate had a bad effect upon her after the dry bracing desert. She suffered a spell of illness, and when she recovered from that she deemed it best to wait for spring before starting west.

In the spring Marian received a reply to a letter she had written Mrs. Wolterson:

"DEAR MARIAN:

"I am long indeed in replying to your most welcome and interesting letter. But you will forgive me, for my excuse is work, work, work. Imagine! out of six white people and thirty little Indian children *I* was the only one not down with influenza.

"We were transferred here, as you already know, and left Mesa without regret, except for our few true friends there. We are fortunate to be retained in the service at all. The wrong done my husband by Blucher and Morgan was not undone and never will be.

Blucher, you will be glad to hear, had a sudden check to his open pro-Germanism. Something or somebody frightened him. Morgan, however, goes on his triumphant way with his Old Book behind him.

"Gekin Yashi has again disappeared. Headquarters reported she had run off. But my correspondent in Mesa does not believe it. No attempt was made to trace her. If she had run off she would have been tracked. Neither Rhur or any of the policemen has left Mesa. I know what I think, and so does Robert. Some day the truth will come out.

"King Point is not at all like Mesa. This place is high up on the desert, over seven thousand feet above sea level. It is bleak, barren, bitter cold, and the winds are terrible. But there is beauty here. Great red bluffs, covered with cedars and sand dunes forever changing with the wind, and yellow mesas, and long white slopes of valley. But the solitude, the cold, and the mournful winds are dreadful. Influenza swooped down on us late in winter. Had spring not come I believe the whole population of thirty-six would have been wiped out.

"I have no direct information regarding influenza ravages at other points on the reservation. But I understand it hit the Nopahs pretty hard.

"You wrote in your letter of returning. We are glad to hear this news. Mrs. Withers wrote me that she had received a letter from Nophaie from France, and that he said he had seen you on the pier at Hoboken just before his ship sailed.

"All good wishes to you, Marian, and let us hear from you.

"Sincerely,

"BEATRICE WOLTERSON."

Marian went back to the Indian country prepared to work independent-

ly for the welfare of the Nopahs. At Flagerstown she rented a little cottage out near the pines, from which she could see the green slopes and gray peaks of the mountains.

Marian's first trip on the desert took her to King Point, where she spent a profitable day with the Woltersons. King Point was as cool and pleasant in summer as Flagerstown. Marian found instant antagonism in the head of the Indian school there, making any project of hers rather out of the question. Besides, there was no place to stay.

To Marian's regret, she found matters not happy for the Woltersons. They had encountered the same underhand tactics that had been operative at Mesa. Moreover, the altitude and the cold, and the poor quarters furnished by the government, had not improved his always poor health.

Before Marian left, Wolterson told her about the little settlement of Nokis at Copenwashie, how they were growing poorer in water and land and had a hard winter ahead of them.

"Shore, they'll not be able to feed their stock," he said.

"Why?" inquired Marian.

"Because they have less land than formerly and very little water. They can't raise enough alfalfa."

"Why less land than formerly?"

"Friel and Morgan have gotten most of the Indians' land."

"Oh, I remember. But *how* can they do that?"

"Listen and I will tell you," replied Wolterson. "First Friel or Morgan selected the particular piece of ground he wanted. Then he got the superintendent to report to Washington that his land was not needed by the Indians. It was naturally the best piece of ground. The government granted the use of a little tract of land upon which a church might be built. Soon it was further reported that this was not sufficient for the missionary to raise garden and hay. Another tract was available and this was also turned over. After a time Friel applied for and received a patent to this land. Other patents are pending. With the land goes a supply of water for irrigating, and often in addition a good spring, and this much water is simply taken from the Indians. Water on the desert is limited. Last year was dry. This one may be drier. And there you are."

Marian had planned to go next to Kaidab, but now she decided first to look over the field at Copenwashie. The Paxtons at Mesa gave her a warm welcome, and between them, for the sake of a subterfuge that might be wise, they arranged a basket and blanket buying job for her.

Copenwashie lay down on the edge of the mesa two miles or more from the government post. At any time it was a barren, desolate outlook, and in summer the heat made it mercilessly inhospitable to a white person.

The Nokis were agricultural in their pursuits, not nomads like the Nopahs. Their houses were flat-roofed, built of stone and adobe, cool in summer and warm in winter, a very great improvement on the hogan of the wilder Nopah.

Marian went from door to door of these little low houses and asked for baskets. She saw stoves, beds, sewing-machines common to white households. The rooms she got a peep into were whitewashed and clean. The Nokis spoke a little English, but they were reserved and shy. Marian was hard to please in style of baskets, but

she paid the price asked without haggling.

When she left the village and ascended the slope to the level of Mesa she looked back. The place seemed a jumble of little rock and mud huts perched on the very edge of a precipice. Below lay a wide green valley with Indian laborers at work and threads of water running to and fro. To the right of where Marian stood loomed an imposing structure of stone, built by masons, two stories high and with a tower. This was the home of Friel. Somehow Marian resented its presence there.

Three or four times a week she visited the Noki village. On each trip she bought baskets, and she always left candy and dolls and musical toys with the children.

She anticipated embarrassing situations and prepared for them. Jay Lord sat on the trading-post steps during the summer evenings. Morgan had asked somebody what that "white-faced cat" was doing back on the reservation? Friel had learned of her presence. But so far Marian had been fortunate enough to avoid meeting either of them face to face.

If happiness could have been hers it might have come to her here on the desert that had somehow changed her, and in the work she had chosen. But she could not be really happy. Nophaie wrote but seldom. He was "somewhere in France." His letters were censored, and he wrote so little of himself. Marian lived in constant dread that she would never hear from him again—that he would be killed.

With the end of summer there seemed to be an end to the uneventful waiting monotony of her life.

Withers called for her one day and packed her off in his car to Kaidab. His wife was not very well and needed a change of climate, and wanted Marian to take a short trip with her to California. Marian gladly consented, and while preparations were under way for this journey she rode horseback, and climbed high on the black mesa to try to get a glimpse of Nophaie's country. All she could attain was sight of the red pinnacles of the monuments of the Valley of Gods. But she was grateful for that.

Withers found the time propitious for a short absence from Kaidab. His partner, Colman, said business would grow poorer instead of better. The decline of the Nopahs' fortunes had begun. Price of wool had been steadily falling. There was no demand for baskets and blankets.

Withers's son Ted had gotten to France, but he was still among the reserves, back of the front line, and that fact evidently irritated the Westerner. He wanted his son to fight. Mrs. Withers, on the other hand, was grateful for the chances that had so far spared her only son. The sister of this boy shared her father's aggressive ideas.

The last day of Marian's stay at Kaidab she prevailed upon Miss Withers to ride out and climb the highest point available. Withers sent one of his Indian riders with them. They had a long, hard, and glorious ride. From the brow of a great divide Marian saw the whole vast reach of the Valley of Gods —the red sentinels of the desert—lonely and grand against the haze of distance.

Marian felt a tremor that was more than thrill. Her breast heaved, her sight dimmed. Wild, lonely, beautiful land of sage and canyon! She loved it.

Upon their return Withers was waiting at the gate for the riders. His face

wore an excited, happy expression.

"Get down and come in," he called. "Come a-rustlin' now. I've got news."

Marian tumbled off some way, and ran at the heels of Withers's daughter, who was crying: "Oh! Dad's got a letter from Ted!"

So it turned out to be. The trader fumbled over many sheets of paper, closely covered with writing.

"Sis, you can read all of this afterward," he was saying. "Ted's all right. He says what I told you all—the Huns are licked. Marian, your Nophaie has got the D.S. medal! *What* do you know about that?"

Marian could not have spoken then to save her life.

The trader fumbled over the sheets of paper.

"Here," he began, "this letter seems less cut up than any we've had. Ted writes: 'I had some luck. Happened to run across a soldier—who'd been in the thick of the front-line battles with some of our Indians. What he had to say about them was aplenty. His name is Munson. He hails from Vermont. He'd not only been in the front-line trenches with our Indians, but in the hospital with some of them.

"'A good many Indians have been killed. Whether or not any of them were Nopahs I can't say. But the Indian who pulled the bear-trap stunt is our own nutty Shoie, the spellbinder. Every night or so Shoie would pull a crippled German into the trenches. These German soldiers would have either an arm or leg broken, and terribly lacerated. Shoie was watched. And it was discovered that he pulled these crippled Germans into the trenches in a number-four bear trap, attached to a long wire. Shoie would crawl out in the darkness—they say he always picked the places where German soldiers were sneaking—and set the bear trap. Then he'd slip back to the trench to wait. When he got one, everybody along that line sure knew of it. For the Germans hollered like hell. All Shoie said was: "Me catch-um whole damn German army!"

"'Well, there's more about Nophaie. Munson lay in the hospital with him, and found out he had been wounded four times, the last time seriously. But he seemed nearly well then. That was three weeks ago. Nophaie was to be discharged and sent home as an invalid, incapacitated for further service. Shell shock had affected him somewhat, and gassed lungs made him a probable consumptive. But to Munson he was certainly far from a physical wreck. I think Munson said Nophaie got into the great Chatoo-Therry (how'd you spell that?) mix-up, and that an officer gave him the D.S. right off his own breast.

"'Anyway, Nophaie, along with other Indians, must be on the way home by now. I'm sure glad. It simply was grand to hear what devils they were among the Germans. A lot of Americans, including myself, haven't ever appreciated the red man.'"

Chapter Eighteen

Warrior's Return

NEWS of the armistice did not reach Mesa until late in the afternoon of that memorable November day. It came from the lips of the mail carrier. He was not credited. Paxton rushed to the telephone to call up Flagerstown, only to find the wire

down. A crowd of Indians collected around the mail carrier, and they all believed him. Only the whites were skeptical.

Marian went out through the store, down the stone steps, and into the crowd of Indians around the mail carrier. Resolutely forcing her way in, she got to the mail carrier.

"What have you heard?" she asked.

"War over. Germans run—holler no more shoot—want make big council," he replied.

"Who said so?"

"All come over wire. Heap talk over wire. Men run round—get drunk—white squaws yell like hell. All stop work—bells ring—big smoke pipe on lumber mill blow steam long time—no hear."

Marian hurried back to the Paxtons. "Friends, the Indian is telling the truth. There's a jubilee in Flagerstown. What else but peace could account for it?"

Supper was not thought of. Outside in front of the trading post the crowd grew apace, and now white faces began to mingle with the dark ones. Friel's car came humming along, and it contained three other white men and several Indians. The latter leaped off as Friel drove on. He saw Marian standing on the steps, and waving his hand he yelled, "War over!" Marian waved back, and this was the only time she had ever been glad to see the missionary.

The November air was raw and cold. It chilled Marian through. She went into the Paxtons' sitting-room, where she sat by the window. The trader came through and opened the window.

"Don't miss anything. There'll be hell. Blucher has arrested some Nopahs. I'll bet they never go to jail."

The crowd swelled to upward of a hundred Indians, a motley dark assemblage, divided into several groups, each of which undoubtedly surrounded an Indian with a bottle. The white men had drawn apart.

Marian saw an Indian running down the avenue between the poplars. Some of the watching Indians shouted. This Noki evidently was frightened, for he looked back, and then darted in among his fellows.

Friel's car appeared, still containing the same number. Marian recognized two of them. The missionary drove to the steps, where he stopped the car and got out. Manifestly he was starting for the window to speak to Marian, when one of the other men called out, "Hold on, Friel."

The missionary, halted by the peremptory call, impatiently turned back. The Indians were looking up the avenue. Marian heard another car coming. Before it reached range of her sight four white men came hurrying along. Rhur, the policeman, was the foremost, and the last two were Glendon and Naylor. Marian did not recognize the second man.

Then the second car hove in sight. Sam Ween, the interpreter, was driving it. Morgan stood on the running-board and Blucher stood up inside. When the car stopped Morgan dropped off and Blucher piled out.

"Arrest that Indian!" he yelled.

Rhur penetrated the suddenly silent crowd of Indians, and one of his deputies, the stranger Marian did not recognize, rather haltingly followed him. Morgan edged away from the ominous-looking front line of Indians. Presently that line was broken to emit Rhur dragging an Indian behind him—the Noki that had hidden. Blucher ran in

and shackled him.

"What'd you put irons on him for, you blockhead?" called Morgan. "Indians hate irons. And I told you they were in bad mood. Some of them drunk!"

"Who's doing this?" hoarsely called the agent.

The younger Indians suddenly appeared to move in unison and to spread round Blucher and his men. They closed in, shouting.

"Let that Indian go!" yelled Morgan.

"See him—in hell first," yelled back Blucher.

Then the crowd became noisy, violent, and decidedly threatening. Marian lost sight of the white men in the mêlée. The Indians surged into a knot. That, too, broke as before, and it let out the white men, disheveled, pale, and thoroughly frightened. The Indians had forced Blucher to unshackle the Noki he had arrested. They jeered at him. Bottles flashed aloft, held by dark, sinewy hands. Blucher was forced back toward the side of the trading-post.

Then older and sober Indians in the crowd dragged the violent ones back and away from the trading-post. But, plainly, it was no easy task. Cooler heads prevailed, however, and it seemed that Blucher and Morgan had narrowly escaped violence.

"What'd I tell you?" shouted the missionary hoarsely.

Blucher vouchsafed no reply. His pale sweaty face seemed to have fixed in an expression of furious trance. Marian had a good look at him as he passed the window to go to his car. He might have been walking in a nightmare. German that he was, he had heard news to unseat his reason for this hour.

Likewise Marian had a fleeting glimpse of Morgan's face. Did she catch a lurking sardonic gleam, a malignant flash of eyes?

December came, bleak and raw, but holding off on the inclement weather that made the desert an inhospitable place for white people. Influenza was reported by the authorities on widely separated parts of the desert. No effort was made to check the disease or to minister to any Indians except the school children.

Marian awoke one day to a realization that she had found favor with the Nokis. She was welcome in the secluded homes of these strange desert people.

After Marian had acquainted herself with the actual condition of these Indians she set to work in her own way to help them. There were babies and old men going blind from trachoma; there were children with congenital hip disease; there were always injured horsemen and sick housekeepers; the whole village was poor and growing poorer. . .

Marian never saw the government school doctor waste a ride down to Copenwashie. She brought a physician from Flagerstown. And his several visits, followed by her own ministrations, alleviated considerable distress. When the skeptical Nokis saw there was no aftermath from this, no obligation, nothing but the kindness of Benow di cleash, they subtly and almost imperceptibly changed. The old Nokis learned to relax their somber faces in a slight smile; the children grew glad to see Marian, more for her presence than for gifts.

Naturally Marian's increasingly close relation to some of the Nokis resulted

in their confidences. And by the middle of December most of the little tribe who owned horses or cattle, and especially all of the freighters were hard pressed for feed for their stock. Marian lent money to some of the neediest. But the situation was not to be met by the little money she could spare. So she took up the matter with Eckersall, the government farmer at Copenwashie.

"Reckon I seen it comin' all along," was Eckersall's reply. "The Nokis are in for a hell of a winter."

"How much will it cost to buy hay for the winter?"

"Them freighters alone will eat up a thousand dollars before spring."

"Oh, so much! Where can we get help?" asked Marian.

"Reckon I don't know. Have you any friends you could ask?"

"Hardly. I wonder if Withers could help us."

"Withers! I should say not. Why, that trader is goin' broke on the Indians this winter."

"Eckersall, who has all the alfalfa raised here this last summer?" queried Marian.

"Friel has most of it."

"Ah! And has Blucher any hay?"

"Aplenty. Some I raised an' the rest freighted from town."

"Well, cannot the Indians get some of that hay?"

"Hump! They'll have to pay high for it. An' jest now is a bad time. Blucher is sore over the meat deal."

"What is that?"

"Wal, Miss, I'm only a government employee, an' I reckon I ought to keep my mouth shut. But I'll go to the agent an' make a strong talk for the Nokis."

"Thank you, Eckersall. That's good of you. Maybe we can do something."

But Marian's hopes were not high. She learned the facts about the meat deal. It appeared that as the winter advanced Blucher had solicited meat from the Nokis and Nopahs. But he would not pay over five dollars for a beef. As a result the Indians sold but little of their stock and the Indian school children had considerably less of a meat diet. Marian knew that the government advanced more money than offered by Blucher. But he refused to pay more than five dollars.

Several days elapsed before Marian again saw Eckersall.

"Miss, I went to our German agent an' I made the speech of my life. I painted the woe of the Nokis an' the sufferin' of the horses as it was never done before. I told him that he made the Nokis freight supplies from town; that he didn't pay them enough; that these freighters had no other way to make a livin'. He said he hadn't any hay to spare at twenty dollars the ton. Go to the missionary!

"Wal, I went to Friel an' talked with him. An' he said *forty dollars* a ton! The Nokis can't pay that. So I went back to Blucher an' railed at him again. He snapped at me: 'If Friel wants forty dollars a ton for their hay, then the Indians will have to pay forty dollars!'"

The Nokis realized that their land was being gradually taken away from them and this winter they had grown restive and morbid under the strain. In former years the Nokis had been allowed to raise alfalfa on a certain number of acres of the school farm, but this year that privilege had been taken from them.

Winter came at last, biting, icy, and the desert became an open waste to dread. Day after day dark clouds rose,

threatening storm.

Privation followed hard on the cold heels of winter, and many of the Noki families began to suffer. What with lack of food for man and beast, the outlook was discouraging indeed. Marian bought stores of supplies from Paxton—who charged exactly what they had cost him—but these did not go far or long.

Then came the incident that heaped fuel on the fires of Noki resentment.

Friel had made a hurried trip to Flagerstown, where he learned that flour had gone up two dollars a hundredweight. It so happened that on his return trip he passed several Noki wagons going into Copenwashie to buy flour. Therefore, in possession of this information, he hurriedly drove to the trading-posts at Copenwashie and Mesa, and bought all the flour the traders had, some two thousand pounds, at the old price.

Friel before this incident had won a universal dislike for himself. He got permission from the agent to preach to the school children after they had assembled in the schoolroom each day. So he chose the first hour of the morning session and talked to the children about his interpretation of the Bible.

The Nokis objected to Friel's taking the time from the school work to impose his doctrine upon them, and they complained to the agent. Nothing was done. The Nokis grew more resentful. A government inspector was sent out. He ruled that the preaching during school hours be discontinued. But after he had gone Friel was seen to get audience with Morgan and Blucher, with the result that he kept up the preaching during the forbidden hour.

The Nokis held council over this turn of affairs. The chief himself came to Marian and asked her to read to him the ruling of the inspector. She did so.

"Benow di cleash, don't you think we ought to kill him?" asked the Noki.

"No, no, you must not," she protested. "Try sending a delegation to face Friel. Show him the inspector's ruling and tell him you have had white people read it."

"Don't you think we ought to kill him?" was all the chief said.

But the next day, while Friel was preaching to the children, this delegation suggested by Marian assembled in front of the village. She had anticipated some untoward event and had borrowed a horse to ride down early. When she neared the village she saw Nokis riding in from the Red Sandy trail. And when she reached the dip of mesa rim she had further cause for excitement.

The delegation contained all the male Nokis, and some of the other sex, with a plentiful addition of Nopahs. The crowd was walking and riding toward the school. Marian followed.

"Friel, come out!" shouted a clear voice, in good English.

It rang in Marian's ears. Unmistakably Indian, but was it Noki? Marian had to restrain a strange agitation. She rode farther, to within one hundred feet of the school.

Friel did not appear promptly enough to please the Nokis. They began to shout. Someone pounded on the door. Then again the clear, high Indian voice pealed above the others, silencing them.

"Come out or we'll come in!"

The door opened and Friel appeared. His face was red.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Get out. Quit preaching," replied the leader, and from the crowd came

shouts confirming his order.

"I won't!" yelled Friel furiously. "Blucher gave me permission to preach. I'm going to do it."

"Read the order from Washington."

The man waved aside the paper flaunted in his face. It appeared to be in the hands of a short Noki, beside whom stood a tall Nopah. He wore a wide sombrero pulled down over his face. The crowd of Indians rode and pressed closer. A low hubbub of voices began to rise.

"Come. Go to Blucher. Let us hear what he says. Let us have understanding. You've got to stop preaching in school!"

"No!" exclaimed Friel hotly. "I won't stop. And I won't go to Blucher."

One of the mounted Nokis cast a lasso, the noose of which circled Friel's neck.

The crowd shouted wildly.

"Haul him out," yelled the leader.

Then the mounted Noki rode away from the school, drawing the lasso taut and dragging the missionary out through the crowd. Both his hands clutched at the noose round his neck. A wild young Noki, mounted on a spirited horse, pulled it up until its front hoofs pawed the air.

"*Hang him!*" this Indian yelled in Noki.

A roar broke from the crowd. In a twinkling the somber spirit broke to let out the devil. But one of this crowd yelled piercingly and split the cordon of Indians closing around the missionary.

That piercing yell not only silenced the angry Nokis; it gave Marian the most startling shock of her life.

The tall Nopah reached Friel's side and his long arms grasped the taut lasso. With one powerful lunge he jerked the Noki from his horse.

That tall form! That action! Marian thought she had lost her mind. Then the Nopah, in recovering from this exertion, rose to expose his face.

Nophaie!

Marian screamed the name, but no sound left her lips. She reeled in her saddle. She clutched the pommel.

One sweep of long arms sent the noose flying from Friel's neck. He fell against the Indian, either in collapse or feigning faint.

The Indian braced Friel, shook him hard, hauled and pushed him through the crowd, and released him at the door of the school. Friel staggered in out of sight. Then Nophaie began to push back members of that mob, once again pressing toward the schoolhouse. Other Indians, guided by his example, fell in line to avert further violence, and at length the whole mass, sullen and gesticulating, was forced back into the village.

It was afternoon and Marian waited in Paxton's sitting-room for Nophaie.

She had met Withers at the post. He had come to Mesa with Nophaie to take her back to Kaidab. They needed her there. Withers had said Nophaie looked well enough. He had reached the reservation from a point on the railroad east of Flagerstown. Two whole days! Forty-eight hours he had been on the desert without her knowledge!

Suddenly she heard a step. Soft, quick, padded sound of Indian moccasin! Her heart stopped beating. Nophaie entered.

"Benow di cleash," he said, in a voice that was rich and happy.

She raised both arms and lips before strength left her. Pressed against his

wide breast, she felt its heave and pound. And his lips!

"Oh, you *seem* well! *Are* you well?" Marian was saying later, for what seemed the hundredth time.

"Well, yes—but I'll never again climb the north wall of Nothsis Ahn," he replied with a sad smile.

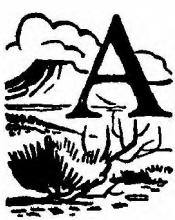
"Nophaie! Oh, I am not quite myself," she whispered. "You feel strong—and you look the same. No, there's a strange change— It's your eyes! Your mouth! They twitch."

"That's only shell shock," he said. "It will pass away. Really I am pretty well, considering. The gas left me liable to consumption, but I haven't got it yet. And my old sage uplands will cure me."

Marian could scarcely believe her eyes. She had expected to see him maimed, broken, aged, wrecked, but he was none of these. Slowly she realized. Then she espied a medal on the dark velveteen shirt he wore. His D.S.!

Chapter Nineteen

The Savage



A MODERATION of the severe January weather attended Marian's arrival at Kaidab. Withers had said to her, "We're a pretty discouraged outfit and we need some of your sunshine. We all had the 'flu' except Colman. Mrs. Withers isn't her old self yet. That's the worst of this queer sickness. It leaves half its victims with some infirmity. We're going to need you, and I reckon you'll be better off and shore happier at Kaidab. And if it's work you're looking for among these poor Indians why— Ha!— I reckon you'll have enough. For this winter has started in a way to scare the daylights out of us."

Nophaie had no home now, except the open, and Withers forced him to accept room and board in his house. Marian was sure that one of the trader's needs of her was to help him keep Nophaie from going back to the hogans of his people, to do which in mid-winter would be fatal for him.

"Marian, you should see Nophaie in the uniform he wore when he got here," said Mrs. Withers one day.

Whereupon Marian asked him to put it on. He refused. She importuned him, only to be again refused. Nophaie seemed a little strange about the matter. But Marian did not care, and, persisting, she followed him into the hall and there she waylaid him.

"Please Nophaie, put your uniform on for me," she begged. "It's only a girl's sentimental whim. But I don't care what it is. That girl loves you."

"Benow di cleash, I hate the sight of that uniform now," he said.

"Oh, why?"

"I don't know. I didn't hate it until I got back here—on the desert—home."

"Oh! Well, you need never put it on again after this time. Just once for me. I want to take your picture."

And she was not above lending her arms and lips to persuasion, which quite vanquished him.

"You're a white girl, all right," he laughed.

"Certainly, and *your* white girl."

Somehow she seemed to want to be unutterably tender and loving to him, as if to make up for what she owed him. But when she saw him stride out in his uniform she quite lost her teasing and affectionate mood.

The slouchy loose garb of an Indian had never done justice to Nophaie. As a soldier he seemed magnificent. She dragged him out in the sunlight and photographed him to her satisfaction.

After dinner he went to his room and returned in velveteen and corduroy, with his silver-buckled belt and moccasins. Nophaie again! Marian felt glad. That soldier uniform had obsessed her. Its meaning was so staggering.

Withers semed to throw off cares of the present and forebodings of the future. He teased Marian and he kept coaxing Nophaie to tell something about the war. Marian added her entreaties to those of the trader. But Nophaie would not speak of himself. He told about the deaths of four of his Nopahs, all in action at the front, and each story had for Marian a singular tragic significance.

It was intensely interesting to hear Nophaie talk of Paris, and crossing on the troop ships, and his return to New York. Marian divined somehow that women had been one of the incomprehensible side factors of the war. A flash of jealousy, like fire, flamed over Marian, only to subside to her absolute certainty of Nophaie's aloofness.

"Withers, this will interest you particularly," said Nophaie, "as it deals directly with the Indian problem. In New York I ran into one of my old college teachers. He remembered me well. Was not at all surprised to see me in Uncle Sam's uniform. He took me to dinner and we talked over my school days and football records. Asked me what I was going to do, and if I'd like a job. I told him I was going home to work with my people.

"He said: 'The work needed among the American Indians now lies along the line of citizenship. This government reservation bureau is obsolete. Reservation officers and politicians want to keep their easy pickings. These fakers encourage the belief that the Indian question is still serious, and that the government must still control them.

" 'The Indian in the war service brought to all intelligent and honest American thinkers something of vital significance. The Indians did not have to go to fight. They enlisted, perhaps ten thousand of them. Many were killed. They were in all branches of the service. I am absolutely certain that these Indian soldiers were not in sympathy with the bunko game of adopting American generals into the tribe. That was only some more of the politician's tricks to keep the reservations under government control and restrict the Indian to the desert.

" 'And it is not only unjust to the Indian, but a detriment to the government and people. If never before, the Indian has now earned a right to get out among white men if he wants to or to live free upon his unmolested land. Suppose the government restricted all the aliens and immigrants who settle in America. They would never become real Americans, as most of them do.' "

Withers then indulged in some language a good deal more forcible than elegant; and he concluded his outburst by asking Nophaie if the official had mentioned Morgan.

"No," returned Nophaie. "Well, when I told him how the missionary with the Old Book behind him actually governed this reservation he was dumfounded."

"Nophaie, how would *you* decide the Indian problem?" asked Withers. "As old Etenia says, you've got a white

mind and red blood. Tell us your angle."

Nophaie leaned on the high mantel and poked his moccasined toe at a stick of wood fallen from the fire. His eyes had the piercing look, the somber blackness peculiar to his kind, but they had something more, and it was much for this nameless light that Marian loved him.

"I could solve the Indian problem. First I'd exclude missionaries like Morgan," he replied, with a strange, dark bitterness. "Then I'd give the Indian land and freedom. Let him work and live as he chose—send his children to school—move among white men and work with and for them. He hates the idea of being dependent. Let him work or idle for himself. In time he would develop into a worker.

"The Indian children should be educated. Yes! But not taught to despise their parents and forego their religion. Indian children would learn—even as I have learned. Let the Indian's religion alone. The Indian is no different from a white man—except that he is closer to elemental life—to primitive instincts. Example of the white man's better ways would inevitably follow association. I think the Golden Rule of the white men is their best religion. If they practiced that the Indian problem would be easy."

Late that night after the Withers family and others of their household had gone to bed Marian sat awhile with Nophaie before the glowing embers in the fireplace.

This hour really was the happiest and most beautiful of any she had ever spent with him. Much of his bitterness had vanished. If he had been great before he went to war, what was he now? Marian could only feel little, humble, adoring, before this strange composite of a man. Nophaie was at once closer to her than ever, yet farther away. All she could do was to grasp at the skirts of the happy and thrilling hour.

Next day bad news arrived, along with more raw, cloudy weather. Both white travelers and Nopah couriers reported increasing illness in the sections of desert they had traversed.

"It's come," grated out Withers, somber as an Indian.

That night the desert wind mourned under the eaves of the house. It had an unearthly sound. Its portent was storm, cold, evil, plague, death, desolation.

At dawn a blizzard was blowing. Snow and sleet and dust sheeted across the bleak levels, obscuring the mesa. It lasted two days, and broke to raw rain that melted most of the snow. Then sleet again, followed by bitter cold!

Nophaie rode the ranges. Neither Withers nor Marian could keep him in. And the concluding weeks of that month brought the catastrophe Withers had predicted.

The Indians were caught like rats in a trap. Their hogans were no places to fight influenza. Three months of growing poverty had suddenly culminated in a terrible situation. These Indians had saved no money. They had only horses, sheep, and corn. The price of wool fell to nothing. Meat and corn were about all most of the Nopahs had to eat, and the time came when many of them did not have that. From a prosperous people they fell in six

months to a starving people, at the mercy of a disease that seemed fatal to most.

In February hundreds died of the disease, within a radius of fifty miles of Kaidab. Whole families were taken. For many more days the sun did not shine, and the nights were black. The Indians thought the sun and moon had failed them. The medicine men prevailed upon them to believe that the only thing left to save them was the eating of horseflesh. Therefore they killed and ate great numbers of their best horses.

One morning Colman found a dead Nopah lying beside the stove in the trading-post. He had probably hidden behind the counter while the trader was locking up. Apparently he had not been ill the previous day. But the influenza had attacked him in the night and had killed him.

Lone sheepherders who had not been seen or met by any Nopah for weeks were found dead. Hogans full of Indians were found dead. Young and old went alike.

"Influenza—pneumonia?" queried Withers scoffingly. "Hell! It's a plague. This damned disease is a beast of hell. Yesterday some Mormons rode through. They told of meeting seven Nopahs on the trail. These Nopahs were okay. Next day they went down in a heap. I sent men over there. Six of the Nopahs were dead. A little boy was living, half buried under the dead bodies. Old Etenia fell off his horse and died in two hours. His family has been nearly wiped out."

In the midst of this tragic time Withers received word that Gekin Yashi had fallen victim to the dread malady. A sick Indian rode in with the news, disclosing the whereabouts of the Little Beauty. She was married to Beetela, a young Nopah chief who had been to France, but who had never given Withers a hint that might have cleared up the mystery of her disappearance.

"Just like a Nopah!" ejaculated the trader. "Well, I'll take the car. Maybe I can drive up to the pass—maybe to the canyon. Give me medicines and whisky."

He had been talking to Colman and his wife. Marian sat beside the fire, startled and grieved into silence. Suddenly Nophaie entered, unfolding his blanket. His quirt hung on his wrist. Snowflakes gleamed on his sombrero.

"Ah! Here's Nophaie," said Withers. "I was hoping you'd get back. Have you heard about Gekin Yashi?"

"Yes. We must hurry. She is dying. And she has a baby."

Marian leaped up, stung into action. "Let me go with you," she entreated.

The ride in the car, with a hot stone at her feet and heavy blankets round her and over her face, was not much for Marian to endure. But when she got into the saddle, headed toward the wind, it was a different matter.

The day was not far advanced, and the sky appeared divided into sections of lowering gray pall, broken purple clouds, and steely blue. The sun shone fitfully. The wind cut like a knife.

A familiar yet strange sensation assailed Marian—something which at first she was at a loss to define. Presently, however, she associated it with the icy, cutting, tangible quality of the air, and from that she discovered it was a faint fragrance of sage.

The threatened storm held off and the wind appeared to be shifting and falling. Marian grew fairly comfortable in the saddle, warming to the exercise.

Nugi Canyon appeared to be a grand winding portal into the solid rock bulk of the upland desert. It had a noble outline of rim, exceedingly broken into spires, domes, crags, peaks, monuments, escarpments, promontories; and the side canyons intersecting it were too numerous to count. At one point Marian rode across a wide open space that might have been the hub of a wheel, from which many canyon spokes ran off in all directions.

About five or six miles up the Nugi there came a change of conformation. It spread wider, the cliffs lowered. Wide flats of greasewood sloped up gradually from the steep red-earth banks of the wash. A shallow muddy creek, lined with shelves of dust-colored ice, wound between them.

"Benow di cleash, do you see there is no feed for horses or sheep here?" asked Nophaie, turning once to wave his hand toward the flats. "This used to be the most fertile of canyons. Two dry years! And do you see the empty hogans?"

How bare the soil! Not a blade of bleached grass! Dead greasewood, gray as ashes, vied with the stunted cedars and a few scrubby oaks in relieving the barrenness of the canyon floor.

Gradually the trail climbed, and gradually the canyon took on more of beauty and less of grandeur. The colors grew brighter. Patches of purple sage made wonderful contrast to the red cliffs. This softer aspect accentuated the loneliness and desolateness of the deserted hogans.

A gray moving cloud, low down, filling the canyon thickly as fog, came swooping down. It was a snow-squall. It obscured cliffs, side canyons, turrets and towers, yet Marian could see its upper margin, a soft rolling gray mass, against the blue of sky.

Withers led off to the left into one of the intersecting canyons. It looked narrow, steep-sided, gloomy, and mysterious under the approaching storm. When the snow reached Marian she had a few moments of exhilaration in the feathery white pall; and then as it came thick and cold she protected her face and paid attention only to the trail.

When Withers rode up a bank, and into a clump of cedars to dismount before a hogan, Marian realized with a shock that she was at the end of the ride. She had forgotten its portent.

Nophaie slid off his horse, and dropping his blanket from his shoulders he bent his lofty form and entered the hogan. Withers ordered the two Indians he had brought with him to build a fire under the cedars.

"Get down and exercise a bit," he said to Marian. "They'll soon have a fire to warm you."

"Won't—you let me see Gekin Yashi?" asked Marian.

"Yes—but wait," he replied, and taking a saddlebag off his saddle he hurried into the hogan.

Marian had scarcely dismounted before the trader came out again, with a look on his face that made Marian's halting lips stiffen.

"Too late!" he ejaculated, a little huskily. "Gekin Yashi died in the night. Beeteia's mother must have gone sometime yesterday. And—"

"Someone said there was a—a baby," faltered Marian.

"Come here to the fire," rejoined the practical Withers. "You look blue—Yes, there is a baby—and it's half white, as any one could see. It's about gone too, breathing its last. I can't do anything but stay—and bury them."

"Oh! Withers, let me go into the hogan?" asked Marian.

"What for? It's no sight for you—let alone the risk."

"I'm not afraid of sight or risk. Please. I feel it's a duty—I cared for Gekin Yashi."

"All right—you can go, but wait," went on Withers. "I want to tell you something. Beeteia was one of the best of the young Nopahs. He had loved Gekin Yashi since she was a kid. But she didn't care for him, and Do etin wouldn't make her marry him. She ran off from the school at Mesa—in her shame. Beeteia found her—his brother, who's with us, told me—and he took her home and married her. The half-white baby was welcome, too. Now he's in there holding on to the poor little dying beggar—as if it were his own."

It took courage for Marian to walk up to that hogan and enter. The smoldering fire was almost out. She saw Nophaie sitting with bowed head beside a young Nopah—the counterpart of hundreds she had seen—who held a four- or five-months-old baby on his lap.

Nophaie did not look up; neither did the other Indian. Marian bent over that tiny bundle and peered into the convulsed face. How dark the Indian's hand alongside of the baby's cheek!

Beyond these sitting Indians lay a blanketed form close to the hogan wall. Snow had drifted in through the open framework of the hogan upon the folds of blanket. Behind Marian on the other side next to the wall lay a slighter form, not wholly covered. Marian saw raven-black hair and shape of head she thought she recognized.

"Nophaie," she whispered. "This—this one must be Gekin Yashi."

"Yes," replied Nophaie, and rising he stripped back the blanket from the dead girl.

At once Marian recognized Gekin Yashi and yet did not know her. Could this be the face of a sixteen-year-old girl?

Marian fled out of the hogan, back to the fire under the cedar. A horror possessed her—of she knew not what. Her own religion and faith rocked on its foundation. Plague and death were terrible, but not so terrible to contemplate as human nature, passion, hate, and life.

Marian's poignant reflections were interrupted by the voice of Withers inside the hogan.

"Nophaie, the baby is dead. Make Beeteia give it up. We've got to bury these Indians and beat it out of here pronto."

Marian spread her cold and trembling hands to the fire. Somehow the trenchant words of the practical trader roused her out of the depths. Nophaie might be taken! He would be if he kept riding the range day and night, exposing himself to both bitter weather and the disease. The fear struck at Marian's heart.

Withers strode out of the hogan, accompanied by the Indians.

"Get the tools," he said, pointing to the pack he had brought.

Nophaie remained beside the hogan door where Beeteia leaned, a tragic and strangely striking figure. He did not seem to hear the earnest words of Nophaie or see the tall form before him. Marian sensed a terrible revolt in him.

Beyond the hogan, in a level patch of sage half-circled by cedars, Withers set the two Indians to digging graves. Then the trader approached the hogan and, wielding an ax began to chop a

hole through the earthen covering and interlaced poles beneath. Marian remembered that the dead bodies of Indians should not be taken out at the door.

Beeteia turned away from Nophaie and went back to his dead. Marian called Nophaie to her, and she led him behind the clump of cedars, where the horses were nibbling at the sage. She held his hand, endeavoring to quell her mounting excitation.

"Benow di cleash, you should not have come," said Nophaie regretfully.

"I'm glad. It has hurt me—done something more than that," she replied. "I was sick—sick deep in my soul. But I'm over it, I think—and now I want to talk."

"Why—you're white—you're shaking!" he exclaimed.

"Is it any wonder? Nophaie, I love you—and I'm terror-stricken. This awful plague!"

He did not reply, but his hands pressed hers closely and his eyes dilated. She wrenched her hands free and then threw her arms around his neck. What she said or did in this mad moment she never realized. But she awakened to a terrifying consciousness that she had inflamed the savage in Nophaie.

He crushed her in his arms and bent to her face with eyes of black fire. He did not kiss her. That was not the Indian way. Tenderness, gentleness, love had no part in this response to her woman's allurement. His mastery was that of the primal man denied; his brutality went to the verge of serious injury to her. But for the glory of it—the sheer backward step to the uttermost thrill of the senses—deep in the marrow of her bones—she would have screamed out in her pain. For he handled her, bent her, swung and lifted her, and flattened her body as might have a savage in sudden possession of a hitherto unattainable woman of the wilds.

Like a sack he threw her across her saddle, head and feet hanging. But Marian, once partially free of his iron arms, struggled and rose, and got into better position on her horse. She reeled against Nophaie. She could scarcely see. But she felt release from his grip. Something checked him, and his blurred face began to grow distinct—to come closer—until it pressed against her bosom.

"White woman—you'll make—an *Indian* of me," he panted in husky, spent passion.

"Nophaie—forgive!" she whispered, encircling his head with her arms, and pressing it closer to her breast. "I've been—beside myself. This plague—this death has made me a coward."

"Benow di cleash, say no more," he said, raising his face.

An hour later Withers's melancholy task had been completed. Beeteia refused to leave with the party. Marian's last sight of him was one she could never forget—the dark-faced Indian standing before the hogan he could never enter again, peering across the graves of his mother and wife, and the ill-gotten baby he had meant to father—across the gray sage flat to the blank walls of stone.

Snow began to fall and the canyon grew gray as twilight. Marian followed the others at a brisk trot. The air had grown colder. When they rode up into the open reach of the main canyon a driving wind made riding against it something to endure. Gray, dull, somber, and dreary wound the Nugi, with

palls of snow swooping low down, roaring through the cedars. The snow was wet. It adhered to Marian's clothes, and grew thicker as she rode on. She could scarcely see where to guide her horse. And she suffered with the cold.

The wind and snow made a sweeping whine through the cedars. As fast as Marian shook off the white covering it returned, until, too weak and frozen to try any longer, she gave up. Branches of cedar stung her cold face. When at last she reached the end of that ride she was glad to let Nophaie lift her off the horse.

Chapter Twenty

A Room to Die In

THREE thousand Nopahs died of the plague, and from one end of the reservation to the other a stricken, bewildered, and crushed people bowed their heads.

Slowly the clutch of fear loosed its possession of Marian's heart. Slowly the long spell of gloom yielded to a hope inspired by sunshine and a steady decline in the death-rate of Nopahs.

They all worked to alleviate the sufferings of the Indians. If the trader had ever saved any money, he lost it all and more that winter. Marian's means had shrunken to almost nothing.

March with its last icy breath of winter yielded to April with its sandstorms. The wind blew a gale one day and the next was calm, warm, with spring in the air. Only a few cases of influenza were reported, and deaths but seldom.

Yet Marian could not quite feel free. Nophaie had ridden to Oljato, and when he did not return the following day a nameless fear laid its cold hand on Marian's soul.

She worked on Withers's accounts that day; she wrote long-neglected letters; she busied herself for an hour over a sadly depleted and worn wardrobe; she rode horseback, out to the rocky ridge above Kaidab, and strained her eyes on the trail of Oljato.

But these energies did not allay her nervousness. She tried the trading-post, which of late had been hard to bear. Hungry, gaunt Indians would come in and stand around, staring with great dark eyes until Withers or Colman gave them something to eat.

Marian saw Indians carrying bows and arrows, a custom long past, which had been resumed because the hunters had sold their guns or could not buy ammunition. Wool had practically ceased its use as a means of trade. The Indians would not shear sheep for the price offered. A few goatskins and an occasional blanket were bartered over the counter. When thought of Nophaie recurred she could no longer stay in the store.

Outside it was growing cool. The sun had set, and there shone a ruddy effulgence over the tilted sections of wall in the west. Coyotes were wailing. Marian walked in the twilight. It seemed an immense and living thing, moving up out of the desert. An oppression weighed upon her. How dark and lonely the empty space out beyond! The stone-walled confines of the wasteland flung their menace at her.

Withers appeared unusually quiet that night. His wife talked a little in her low voice. Marian sat beside the hearth, with eyes on the glowing white and gold embers. Suddenly she was

startled out of her reveries.

"What was that?" she asked.

"Horse. Must be Nophaie," replied the trader, as if relieved.

Marian sat still, listening. At length the door opened with a sweep. Nophaie!

He staggered slightly as he closed the door behind him and leaned back against it. His piercing gaze left Marian's face to search the trader's.

"John—give me a room to die in!"

Withers gasped and sank back limp. His wife uttered a frightened and compassionate cry.

"*It's got me!*" whispered Nophaie.

"Oh, my God—Nophaie!" Marian screamed, and ran to him.

Nophaie reeled over to her. He clasped her shoulders—held her away from him.

"Benow di cleash, I should have been dead—hours ago. But I had to see you. I had to die as—a white man!"

Marian shuddered under the strange clasp of his hands. They burned through her blouse.

"White woman—savior of Nophaie—go back to your people. All—is—well!"

Then he collapsed against her and was caught by the trader. They half carried him to his room and laid him on the bed. Then began frantic ministrations in his behalf. The fire of his face, the marble pallor, the hurried pulse, the congested lungs, the laboring heart all proclaimed the dread disease.

Once in the dim lamplight, as Marian knelt beside the bed in agony, calling, "Nophaie—Nophaie!" he opened his eyes—somber, terrible, no longer piercing with his unquenchable spirit; and it seemed to her that a fleeting smile, the old beautiful light, veiled for an instant his tragic soul and blessed her.

Then it seemed to Marian that a foul black fiend began to thrust the life of Nophaie from her. It became a battle, all unconscious on the part of the victim. Poison fires sucked at his life's blood. This was not an illness—not a disease—but a wind of death that drove out the spirit and loosed devastating corruption upon the living flesh. Yet the vitality of the Indian held it at bay.

The trader entreated her to leave the bedside and at length dragged her back to the sitting-room. There Marian huddled down before the fire, racked with pangs.

Mrs. Withers came and went, softly stepping, tender of hand, but she did not speak. The night wore on. Outside the wind rose, to mourn into the dead silence. The vines under the eaves rustled.

Sometime in the late hours Withers came to her and touched her gently.

"Marian," he said huskily.

"Nophaie—he—is—gone?" whispered Marian, rising.

"No. Unconscious, but he's stronger—or I'm crazy. I must tell you the strangest thing. Nophaie talked of 'turning *white*.' He's out of his head. Marian, it must mean he is true at the last—to the mind—the soul developed in him. Yet his life here was one endless struggle to be true to his birthright. But I don't believe Nophaie will die. He's past the crisis that kills so many. I never saw such strife of spirit against disease. It just can't kill him."

Marian wrapped a blanket round her and went out into the night. The cold desert wind fanned her face and whipped her hair. Dawn was not far away.

"All—is—well!" she breathed Nophaie's words.

Her soul seemed flooded with infinite

thankfulness. Perhaps the tremendous conflict in Nophaie was for more than life. She stood once more with Nophaie on the heights above the Marching Rocks! Had this dark proximity to death illumined his unbelief?

The desert was to be her home. She quivered with happiness to divine that always she was to see the upland sage of purple, the golden-crowned monuments asleep in the sunlight, the long green sweep and slope, the shadows of the silent walls—and somewhere against that background, the Indian Nophaie.

Chapter Twenty-One

Pilgrimage to Naza

NOPHAIE was up and around on the fourth day after the crisis of his illness. He avoided contact with the Indians, and indeed with his white friends also as much as that was possible without being discourteous. And they in turn appeared to understand and help him.

Always while he sat in the warm sun of the May mornings or walked under the greening cottonwoods Marian's eyes followed him. He felt them. And when he met her gaze at close hand there shone a beautiful glad light. It thrilled him, swelled his heart, yet he felt it to be a reckoning he must some time deal with.

In a few more days Nophaie's vigor had returned enough to warrant his leaving Kaidab. So, at an opportune moment, when he was alone with Withers and his wife and Marian, he spoke out about his plan.

"John, will you give me a pack of grain and a little grub?"

"What for?" queried the trader in quick surprise.

"I want to ride off alone—into the sage—and the canyons," replied Nophaie thoughtfully.

Marian left her seat beside the fire and came to him. "Nophaie, are you—strong enough to go riding?" she asked fearfully.

"It will cure or kill me," he replied with a smile, and he took her hand in his.

"Reckon it's not a bad idea," agreed Withers. "You can have anything you want. When'll you go? Tomorrow? I'll get your horse in or you can have one of mine."

"Yes, I'll go at sunrise, before Benow di cleash is up," returned Nophaie.

"You'll go off alone and stay alone?" queried the trader.

"Honest Injun," replied Nophaie.

"Good. Reckon I don't mind telling you I'm worried a little," went on Withers, running his hand through his tousled hair. "Beeteia has begun to play hell with the Indians."

"I knew that," said Nophaie.

"Beeteia!" exclaimed Marian. "Isn't that Gekin Yashi's husband? The young chief I saw up—there?"

"That's the Indian," rejoined the trader. "He's inflaming the others against Morgan and Blucher. I hear he's developed into a wonderful orator—anyway, he has never gotten over Gekin Yashi's death. He is trying to get the Indians to rise against the whites. It probably will fizzle out, but it *might* not. I just don't like Beeteia's influence. Could he be stopped, Nophaie?"

"You would have to kill him," replied Nophaie.

"Ahuh!—Well, all we can do is hope nothing will come of it," returned the

trader, rising.

Mrs. Withers followed her husband out, leaving Nophaie alone with Marian. She still stood by his chair, looking down on him.

"Nophaie, where will you go?" she asked.

"I'll go to Naza."

"So—far?" she ejaculated, with a little catch in her voice.

"It's not far for me."

"But why Naza—if it's only loneliness—the sage and canyons you feel you need?" she went on earnestly.

Nophaie released her hand and put his arm around her waist. He felt a little shock go over her and then a long tremble.

"Benow di cleash, I'm not sure, but I believe I'm going to Naza because it's the greatest god of the Nopahs."

"Oh—Nophaie!" she faltered. "Are you still tortured? You told me how all the Nopah gods failed you. Even Nothsis Ahn was only a gray cold mountain, without voice or soul for you."

"Yes, I remember, Marian," returned Nophaie. "But I don't seem to be tortured or driven, as I was when I climbed the north slope of Nothsis Ahn. It's something I can't explain. I don't even know that my desire to go is anything but physical. Yet I'm in a strange mood. I want solitude. And somehow Naza calls. There's light—perhaps strength for me in those silent canyons."

"Oh, if you could only find peace!"

Nophaie left Kaidab before sunrise and rode out across the desert in the gray melancholy dawn. The discordant bray of a burro was the only sound to break the silence.

From a rise of ground he turned in the saddle to look back at the trading-post. A white object, fluttering from a dark window, caught his quick eye. Marian was waving good-by to him.

Reining in his horse on the height of ground, he watched for a long moment, while conflicting emotions burdened his heart. The little white handkerchief fluttered more vigorously. She saw that he was watching her.

Then he answered with the slow sweeping gesture of an Indian who was going far across the ranges, to a place that beckoned him and from which he would soon return. Wheeling his horse, he rode down the other side of the ridge, out of sight of the post, and forced consciousness of Marian out of his mind.

Nophaie's mount was one of Withers's best, a big strong mottled bay horse, easy-gaited and tireless. He did not appear to note the added weight of pack and blanket tied behind the saddle.

Nophaie felt dizzy and insecure, sensations he attributed to his weakened condition. These would leave him, sooner or later, and for the time being he walked the horse. Once out of sight of fences and cattle he began gradually to relax.

A pink glow suffused the steely blue sky over the eastern ramparts, leagues to Nophaie's right. Northward he could see the tip of a red butte rising above the yellow cedar-dotted ridges of rock. The song of a mockingbird, the yelp of a coyote, the scurrying of a cottontail into the brush gave life to the desert scene. Nophaie avoided the well-beaten trails, so that he would not meet any of his people. He meant not to exchange one word with a living soul while on this pilgrimage.

He crossed the deep wash, and climb-

ing out of it and up the wind-scalloped and rain-carved rocky slope beyond, he reached a point where he might have looked down upon Kaidab, but he faced ahead, eyes keen to catch the first sight of the great valley of monuments.

Soon he espied, from tip down to base, a massive red butte, with columns like a pipe organ, standing out upon the desert from the main wall of the uplands. It was still far, but he hoped to camp there that night and renew acquaintance with the sweet sage slopes where as a boy he had shepherded the flocks of his father.

It was as if he saw the desert with new eyes. All the old landmarks appeared magnified. The walls and pyramids that for hundreds of years had been invested with the spirits of his race seemed glorified in his sight.

Nophaie rode down into a wide yellow-walled canyon and out upon a green and sandy level, where the sun grew hot and the dust puffed up in whorls. The wide far-flung horizon was now lost, and he appeared encompassed by walls, sweeping and long, broken and irregular. For hours Nophaie rode on, aware of sun and wind, of the steady clipclop of hoofs and the swing of the horse, of the open stretch of valley around him and the red and yellow walls that seemed to travel with him. At the far end of this stretch he climbed a low pass, where a colossal black shaft of rock speared the sky, and looked down into the Nopah valley of monuments where his people had lived and where he had been born. The spectacle held him for moments.

His destination for that day was the great pipe-organ mesa, now looming grandly ten miles farther on. It guarded the entrance to the sacred valley, where each separate monument was a god of the Nopahs.

When he reached the magnificent mesa sunset was burning the walls and monuments with gold and rose. The desert floor was gray near at hand, purple in the distance. Above the red barrier which he must climb on the morrow a glorious cloud pageant held his gaze as he leaned panting on his horse.

A thin stream of water wound shining down the sandy wash. The color of cloud and mesa flowed in it. Nophaie unsaddled the horse, fed him grain, and, hobbling him, turned him loose. Then he set about his own simple needs. Hunger was not in him, but he forced himself to eat.

A soft gray twilight was creeping out from the red walls when Nophaie reached the spot where he had sat so many days as a boy, watching the sheep. It was a long ridge not far from the great butte. He found the flat red rock where he and his sister used to sit together. How long ago! She was dead. All his people were gone.

"The Indian in me speaks," he soliloquized. "It would have been better for me to have yielded to the plague. That hole in the wall was my home—this valley my playground. There are now no home, no kin, no play. The Indian's deeds are done. His glory and dream are gone. His sun has set. Those of him who survive the disease and drink and poverty forced upon him must inevitably be absorbed by the race that has destroyed him. Red blood into the white! It means the white race will gain and the Indian vanish. Nophaie is not yet thirty, yet he feels old. He is ruined, he is lost. There is nothing left. He too should vanish. This spot should be his grave. Under the sage!"

But Nophaie's intelligence repudi-

ated that Indian fatalism. It might be true to his instincts, but not to his mind. He was still young. The war had not destroyed him. The plague could not kill him. His body was tough as the desert cedar, his spirit as unquenchable as the light of the sun. Every day that he lived he could mitigate in some degree the misery of his race, if he chose.

But his hatred—the hatred of Morgan and Blucher, of all the white men who had wronged the Indian—that was the cancer in his soul. Then flashed the uplifting thought that the love of Marian, given him with all the wondrous strength and generosity of a white woman's heart, should overcome his hate, compensate for all his sufferings, and raise him to a state far above revenge or bitterness. She had paid him for all personal wrongs done him by her people.

But here Nophaie felt the ignominy of his bitterness. His love for Benow di cleash, her love for him, did not seem to have power over that hate. Something more was needed. And suddenly he knew this was the meaning of his strange quest—of his pilgrimage to Naza.

In the rosy, silent dawn, with the sunrise at his back, Nophaie rode into a dim and untrodden trail that climbed from the low country, up over the first red rampart, and on across a flat region of rocks and washes, up again and farther, higher into the uplands of cedar, piñon, and sage. Behind him the great shafts and monuments rose out of the lowlands, continuing to a level where Nophaie rode in the same red stratum. Often he turned to gaze back, to see them dark and majestic against the white clouds.

He rode up a bare slope of rock, a gradual mile in ascent, wavy and hummocky with ridges and hills, canyons and holes, yet always bare yellow rock. Then he turned a great corner of wall and lost the backward view. To the fore was cedared flat, mile on mile, red-rocked and green-patched, stretching away to another wall.

Nophaie rode at a trot now, and entered this flat belt, to come at length to a deep canyon. It yawned below him, half a mile in depth, with ragged slopes too precipitous for any but an Indian trail. Nophaie walked, leading the horse. From the opposite rim another flat stretched out endlessly toward the mountain wall, now vivid in colors of red, yellow, and violet.

Nophaie arrived at its base in the gray of twilight, and made dry camp in a clump of cedars. He was getting away from the Indian reservation now. Nophaie felt strange relief, that was almost shame. Was he running away from his race in more ways than one?

Next morning Nophaie climbed the barefaced mountain wall that seemed insurmountable. It resembled a barrier of human passion. Spent, wet, and burning, he fell on the rim and panted. Ten days ago he had been abandoned by his tribe as a dead man! But his white friends had ministered unto him. His white sweetheart had prayed for his life. She had not confessed that; no one had told him, but he knew. He was alive. He was a man.

Nophaie labored to his feet and mounted the horse. Something ineffably sweet and precious went fleeting over him. He could not grasp it.

For miles he rode through cedar and sage upland. At noon the tremendous chasm of Nopah yawned in sight. It was wide and very deep, and marked

by talus of many hues—clays of lilac, heliotrope, and mauve. There was no vegetation—only a barren abyss of erosion and decay. It opened into a colored gulf where all was dim, hazy, vast.

Gazing down, Nophaie experienced a thrill of exultation. He would cross this canyon where few Nopahs had ever set foot.

The ordeal consumed the rest of that day. Nophaie lost himself in absorption of declivity and descent, of sliding slope, of weathered rock and dusty wash, of the heat of cliff and glare of red, of vivid green cottonwoods and shining surging stream, of sheer looming colossal wall, and of the crawl upward like a lizard.

His reward was the rolling purple-saged, green-cedared plateau crowned by noble Nothsis Ahn. Crags of yellow, black belts of spruce, gleams of white snow—thus the Mountain of Light returned to Nophaie. It was the same. Only he had changed. How could wars of selfish men affect Nothsis Ahn?

The sun was far down in the west. Nophaie chose an open patch of sage, backed by cedars, and here he made camp, with Nothsis Ahn looking down upon him.

Two days later Nophaie had crossed the uplands, traveled down under the north slope of the great mountain, down and down into the canyons.

It was summer down there. Hot, fragrant air moved lazily in gentle winds. Green trees and grass and flowers and silver scale bordered the narrow red-walled lanes. Indian paintbrush added its vermilion and magenta to the colorful scene.

Down and down Nophaie rode, under the gleaming walls, through sunlight and shade, along and across the murmuring rock-strewn brooks, beside banks of amber moss and white lilies, and through thickets of green oak and cottonwood, down at last into the well-remembered and beloved place where he had lived so long in loneliness and solitude—his Canyon of Silent Walls.

Nophaie rested there that night and the next day. He strove valiantly to make the idle hours those of an Indian contented with natural things. Still he felt the swelling in him of a great wave of emotion. Something was about to burst within him, like the breaking of a dam.

Starting on his pilgrimage again at sunset, Nophaie rode all night, down Naza Boco, the canyon in the far depths of which hid the great Nopah god.

That ride seemed a vigil. Daylight would have robbed it of its strange spiritual essence. The shadows under the mounting walls now showed black and again silver. The star-fired stream of blue sky above narrowed between the black rims, farther and higher as he rode down and down into the silent bowels of the rock-ribbed earth. Every hour augmented the sense of something grand, all-sufficing, final, that awaited him at the end of his pilgrimage.

Dawn came with an almost imperceptible change from black to gray. Daylight followed slowly, reluctantly. It showed Nophaie the stupendously lofty walls of Naza Boco. Sunrise heralded its state by the red-gold crown on the rims. Gradually that gold crept down.

Nophaie rode round a rugged corner of the wall to be halted by a shock.

Naza! The stone bridge—god of the Nopahs—arched magnificently before

him, gold against the deep-blue sky. He gazed spellbound for a long time, then rode on. At first it had seemed unreal. But grand as Naza towered there, it was only a red-stained, black-streaked, notched and cracked, seamed and scarred masterpiece of nature. Wind and rain, sand and water were the gods that had sculptured Naza.

Nophaie rode under the bridge, something that a Nopah had never done before him. The great walls did not crumble; the stream of blue sky did not darken; Nothsis Ahn, showing his black-and-white crown far above the notch of the canyon, did not thunder at Nophaie for what would have been a sacrilege for a Nopah.

Leisurely Nophaie unsaddled and unpacked in the shade of a cedar. Already the canyon was hot. The crystal amber water of the stream invited relief from thirst and heat.

Nophaie spent the long austere day watching the bridge from different angles, waiting for what was to happen to him.

Then came the slow setting of the sun, a strange thing here in the depths of the canyon. Nophaie watched the marvelous changing of colors, from the rainbow hues of the arch to the gold of the ramparts and the rosy glow on the snowy summit of Nothsis Ahn. Twilight lingered longer than in any other place Nophaie remembered.

Darkness fell. The low murmur of the stream seemed to emphasize the lonesomeness. At long intervals owls mourned their melancholy refrain. Naza stood up dark and triumphant, silhouetted against the sky, crowned with silver stars. Nophaie saw the Dipper turned upside down. By night the bridge gained something spectral and mysterious. Night augmented its grandeur.

Toward dawn a faint green light shone on the walls facing the south. The moon was rising. After a while the gleam grew stronger. Soon the shadow of the bridge curved on the opposite wall, and under the arch shone a dim moonlight, weird and beautiful.

Nophaie prayed. With all the passion of his extremity he recalled the prayers of the Nopahs, and spoke them aloud, standing erect, with face uplifted in the moonlight. His impulse had been mystic and uncontrollable. It came from the past, the dim memories of his childhood. But it left him cold.

Time ceased for Nophaie. Earth and life seemed to stand still. Would there ever be another dawn? At last he found a seat against a huge fragment of cliff and from here he gazed with renewed eyes.

What was the secret of Naza? The name was only Indian, handed down from those remote progenitors of the Nopahs who came from the north. Was there any secret? Blank wall of black on one side, wall of moonlit marble on the other, gleaming pale, sheered to the wan-blue, star-fretted sky; and across the opaque space arched the spectral rock rainbow, magnified in its night shadows.

Nophaie saw it now as if blindness had fallen from his eyes—saw it in all its nakedness and strength, its appalling beauty, its terrific strangeness. But it had become a thing, physical, inanimate, static. Beauty upheld by stark stone! Sublimity carved by the chisels of wind and water!

Naza! The Nopah God! Bridge of sandstone! Those walls had been cut by the flowing of water, by the blowing of wind. Thousands of millions of

tons of sand had eroded away—to leave Naza arched so magnificently there, as if imperishable. But it was not imperishable. It was doomed. It must fall or wear away. All that exceeding beauty of line and color, that vastness of bulk, must in time pass away in tiny grains of sand, flowing down the murmuring stream.

Then to Nophaie came the secret of its great spell. For Nophaie it spelled freedom. Its isolation and loneliness and solitude meant for him the uttermost peace. Just so long as he could stay there he would be free, all-satisfied.

The world of man, race against race, the world of men and women, of strife and greed, of hate and lust, of injustice and sordidness, these were not here in the grand shadow of Naza. Nothing of the diseased in mind and body, the distorted images of mankind, the incomprehensible stupidity, the stony indifference to nature and beauty and ideals and good—nothing of these here in this moon-blanched canyon.

For the period of its endurance Naza would stand there, under its gleaming silent walls, with its rainbow hues and purple shadows at sunset, its golden glows and rosy veils at sunrise. The solemn days would pass and the dreamful nights. Peace and silence would reign.

As the sun cleared away the shadows of night, so the spell of Naza clarified Nophaie's mind of superstition, of doubt and morbid fear. In this deserted, haunted hall of the earth, peace, faith, resurging life all came simply to him. The intimation of immortality—the imminence of God! His strife of soul ended forever in his realization of the Universal God of Indian and white man.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"All Is Well."

AT KAIDAB trading-post Marian watched the desert horizon with troubled eyes. Nophaie had been absent for over two weeks. And developments of the last few days and nights had somewhat disrupted the even tenor of Withers's household.

One night signal fires had suddenly blazed up on all the lofty points around Kaidab. Next day bands of Indians rode by, silent and grim, scarcely halting at the trading-post.

"There'll be trouble at Mesa," Withers said, with fire in his eye. In the afternoon he drove away in his car.

That night more fires burned. To Marian it seemed that the heavens were aflame.

Next day many Nopahs trooped by the post. Then with the advent of darkness the magnificent panorama of fires was repeated. By midnight they burned out.

Next morning Marian was on the verge of despair. Catastrophe had befallen Nophaie or he would have returned long ago. She connected his absence with this uprising of the Nopahs. Nevertheless, she scanned the desert horizon to the north, praying that she might see Nophaie ride into sight.

Her attention, however, was attracted to the other direction. The droning of another motor car roused Marian to eagerness. She ran from the porch to the gate. Dust clouds were traveling swiftly along the road toward the post.

In a moment more she was confronted by a dust-begrimed Withers.

"Howdy, Marian!" he greeted her.

"Where's everybody? I shore drove some. But bad news travels fast on the desert, an' I wanted to beat it here."

"Bad—news?" faltered Marian.

"Wal, I reckon," he returned darkly. "Come on in an' find my wife."

"Nophaie!—Have you seen *him?*" whispered Marian.

"They're bringin' Nophaie in Presbrey's car. He's alive—an' for all we could see he's unhurt. But he's in bad shape. Come, here's the wife. She looks scared, too."

While Withers half led and half carried her into the living-room Marian fought desperately to ward off the sick faint blackness that threatened to overcome her. Withers lowered her into a chair.

"Wal, wife, you're 'most as pale round the gills as Marian," he began. Then he heaved a great breath of relief and flopped into a chair. "Listen. Beetela's uprisin' flivvered worse then we'd have dared to hope for. When I got to Mesa there was a mob, a thousand Nopahs an' Nokis hanging around powwowin', waiting for Blucher an' Morgan. Luckily they'd gone away—to fire some poor devil off the reservation, I heard. The Indians thought they'd run away to Washington, to get the soldiers. They cooled off. Then old Indians harangued them on the foolishness of this uprisin' business. Beetela was hustled away to save him from arrest. So far so good!

"Last night we got word that Presbrey's post was to be burned," went on the trader. "I didn't believe it because Presbrey stands well with the Indians. But it worried me. So I left Mesa an' drove pronto for Presbrey's. Was shore relieved when I saw his tradin'-post safe an' sound. Presbrey told me Blucher, Morgan, an' Glendon had hid all night in his post an' had just left, takin' the old road over the ridge. Presbrey said a good many Indians had passed his post in three days. Yesterday they petered out, an' last night Blucher an' Morgan came."

"I heard their car. I thought it was you returning," spoke up Marian.

"Wal, while Presbrey an' me were talkin' three Nopahs rode up," continued Withers. "We figgered somethin' was wrong, an' finally got news that Shoie was at the mouth of the Nugi with a gang of Nopahs. They had been on their way to burn Presbrey's post an' were stopped by Nophaie. So tellin' Presbrey to follow me I hit only the high places. At the Nugi I found Shoie with some two hundred Indians. Nophaie was there, lying under a cedar beside my horse he'd evidently ridden to death. Shoie was with him.

"Nophaie was exhausted almost to the last heartbeat. Shoie wouldn't talk. The Indians were sullen. It took some time for me to piece together what this all meant. But I'm sure I got it figgered. Nophaie must have heard on the uplands that Shoie was bent on mischief. Anyway, Nophaie headed off Shoie, an' at least stopped the burnin' of Presbrey's post. Doesn't it have a strange look, when you think about Blucher an' Morgan bein' hid in that very tradin'-post at that very hour? Shoie would have burned them alive. Nophaie is the only man who could have stopped Shoie."

"Then—Nophaie saved their lives—Morgan—Blucher—Glendon?" burst out the trader's wife.

"Wal, I reckon," replied Withers grimly. "It's quite beyond me— Presbrey came along soon an' we put Nophaie in his car, where there was more room. They'll be here presently."

Mute and stifled, racked by a convulsion rising in her breast, Marian fled to her room and locked the door and pulled down the shades. Then in the gloom of the little adobe-walled room she succumbed to the fury of a woman once in her life reverting to primitive instincts.

"Oh, I could kill them—with my bare hands!" she panted.

When her mind cleared she found herself lying on the bed, spent and disheveled. Slowly she realized what havoc had been wrought in her by passion. She was amazed at this hitherto unknown self, but she made no apologies and suffered no regrets. In a revulsion of feeling that ensued she crept off the bed to her knees, and thanked God.

Nophaie had always been a man, and one prompted to swift, heroic, generous acts, but this saving of the Mesa triumvirate from the vengeance of Gekin Yashi's race, from a horrible death by fire, could mean only that Nophaie's pilgrimage to Naza had saved his soul. She absolutely knew it.

A knock on the door interrupted her devotions.

"Marian, come," called Mrs. Withers. "Nophaie is here."

Leaping to her feet, Marian stood a moment, trembling and absorbed.

It took a few moments to smooth out hair and attire and erase somewhat the havoc of emotion from her face. By the time she passed through the living-room to the door she was outwardly composed.

Through the green cottonwoods Marian espied a car in front of the gate, with an excited crowd around it. Mrs. Withers stood holding the gate open. Marian halted outside the door. She saw moccasined feet and long limbs incased in yellow corduroy slowly slipping down out of the car. Then she saw a silver-ornamented belt, and a garnet velveteen shirt. Next Nophaie's dark face and bare black head emerged from the car. Withers and another man helped him out.

Marian's devouring gaze flew over him. His tall lithe form, so instinct with grace and strength, seemed the same as always. Then she saw his face distinctly. There shone upon it a kind of dark radiance. He smiled at her. She ran to meet him to halt the little procession.

"Nophaie!" she said tremulously.

"All is well," he replied.

Everything that was humanly possible was done for Nophaie. But it was manifest that he was dying and that the last flickering of his spirit had been held for this moment with the white girl.

She knelt beside him.

"Nophaie—your pilgrimage was not—in vain," she asserted brokenly. "You found—"

"Your God and my God—Benow di cleash," he whispered, a dark mystic adoration in the gaze he fixed on her. "Now all is well! Now—all—is—well!"

THE END

T. J. and the Mermaid

By CLARK GRAY

I WENT to Kaw to get groceries and some warble dope and a jug refill. While I was there I stopped in at the printshop and had a piece of paper printed up. I pasted the paper on the jug.

That evening, I put the jug under my elbow and took it into the office of T. J. McDowell, my boss.

T. J. was sitting with his old boots on the roll-top desk, reading the Kansas City *Star*. T. J. was a little gent, for a cowman. He had more wrinkles than a turtle, and more experiences than a mossyhorned old range bull.

I said, "T. J., I solved the problem."

T. J. squinted at me over his newspaper. "What problem, son?"

CANNY *T. J. McDowell angles for Deacon Charley Smith's pasture—using a live redheaded mermaid for bait! First publication.*

"Them windies of yours. I'll believe 'em now." I showed him the jug with the printing on it.

T. J. screwed a few more wrinkles into his face and looked as if I'd kicked him in the pants. He glared at the printing. It said:

Tarantula milk. Milked from a yellow-backed tarantula in the dark of the moon. Will make a man believe anything after two snorts. Guaranteed!

I could see T. J.'s lips move as he

read the printing on the jug. He read it twice. Then he scratched his neck and tried hard to look sad.

"Son, you hurt my feelings. I can't help it because the things that happened to me are hard to believe."

I said, "I know it, T. J. That's how come I got this tarantula milk. I don't aim to hurt your feelings no more."

I pulled up a chair and took a snort of the tarantula milk. It was good white mule, the best in Kaw, made by a Seminole Indian who was a friend of mine. It was warm, going down.

I said, "Want to give her a try, T. J.? Let's see if I really got my money's worth."

T. J. folded up his newspaper and grunted. He put his eye on me, looking severe. I knew what he was thinking. T. J. took a certain pride in his tall tales. He was thinking he'd outdo that tarantula milk if he had to bust a brain cell doing it.

"All right," T. J. said. He bent over and took his boots off, then propped his sock feet on the desk and wiggled his toes. Then he coughed.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I was a catfish, son?"

"A catfish? I reckon not, T. J." I took another snort of tarantula milk, then nodded, very sober. "But it sounds plumb reasonable."

T. J. didn't move, but a few more wrinkles came into his cheeks and he got a determined gleam in his eye. He said, sort of grimly:

"It was all because of a mermaid. You've heard of mermaids, son. I found this one in the Arkansas River, one day in '87. I was just stripping off my shirt to have a bath . . ."

He was just stripping off his shirt to have a bath (T. J. said) when he saw a strange object rising out of the shallows not far from the river bank. The object climbed up on an old elm log, shedding bright drops of water. T. J. recognized it instantly for a mermaid.

T. J. claimed he wasn't very much surprised to see a mermaid pop up in the middle of the Arkansas River, a thousand miles from salt water. Stranger things had happened (T. J. said) even if there were fools who wouldn't believe them. So he just stood there with his shirt dangling in his hand and looked at the mermaid, and she looked at T. J.

She was a redheaded mermaid. Her hair hung down over her shoulders. She was a Grade A sample of female pulchritude.

Now T. J. was a bachelor, but that didn't mean he was inexperienced. In fact, he was quite a hound dog. So he decided to follow his usual routine with pulchritudinous females. He tipped his Stetson and grinned a wicked grin.

The mermaid said, "You're a skinny swab."

T. J. nodded gravely. "So's a stick of dynamite, honey."

The mermaid said, "What's your name?"

"I'm T. J. McDowell," T. J. said, "and I'm a hound dog. How about a kiss?"

"Belay that!" The mermaid wiggled her fishtail impatiently. "I haven't got time for kissing just yet."

"You in a hurry about something?" T. J. asked curiously.

The mermaid nodded. She took another long look at T. J., evidently making up her mind about something. Then she said:

"I'll tell you why I'm here, T. J. Maybe you can help me. It's like this: I'm a girl who's got her pride. You can

tell by looking at me that I'm sensitive and intelligent. Well, naturally, that makes me choosy about what kind of male I associate with."

The mermaid stroked her red hair and smiled crookedly.

"A couple of my girl friends have been a little catty lately. Hinting that I couldn't get a man and that I'd better settle down and marry an electric eel I know."

T. J. said, "You ought not to do that, honey. That'd be shocking." And T. J. hit his knee and bent over and whooped with laughter.

The mermaid looked a little sick. She made a move as if to slip off her elm log and swim away, then sighed and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I've come this far—" She spoke to T. J. "You really want to kiss me?"

"Honey," T. J. said, still snickering, "I've chewed peyote and I've ate rattlesnake meat. But I ain't never kissed a fish before. Swim over thisaway."

"Uh-uh." The mermaid shook her head. "I want something, first. I want you to promise to take me to a cattle ranch."

"A ranch?" T. J. gawked and scratched his head. "What for?"

"I want to find me a man," the mermaid said.

"Honey," T. J. said, "you hurt my feelings. I'm the he-ingest he-man in the Nations."

"You may be," the mermaid said, "but I want to shop around a little. I'm awfully inexperienced, T. J."

"I can see that." T. J. scratched his head some more, thinking. "Honey, didn't I read in the old books that you mermaids can assume the form of a human?"

"You watch me," the mermaid said.

She swam downstream to where a giant willow tree had half fallen into the water. She worked her way into the branches of the tree; T. J. caught tantalizing glimpses of pink flesh through the green leaves. T. J. blinked and when he looked again she was walking out on the bank, fully dressed like a human female, with legs instead of a fishtail.

"Honey," T. J. whistled admiringly, "wait'll I tell the other hound dogs about this! Look, how about that kiss now—to sort of get acquainted?"

"Suits me," the mermaid said; "I've got to start getting experience sometime."

So T. J. swaggered up and kissed her. Now T. J. had done a plenty of kissing in his time, and if that mermaid was inexperienced, T. J. decided that no man with red blood would ever notice it. When it was over, T. J. backed off and took about ten minutes to regain his wind. The mermaid was regarding him anxiously.

"Was it a good kiss, T. J.? Did it have enough power behind it?"

"Baby," T. J. said earnestly, "they could hook you to a telegraph line and throw away every battery in the country. You could make yourself a million dollars."

"I don't want a million dollars," the mermaid said. "All I want is a man. You've had your kiss, T. J. Let's go find me some wild and woolly cowboy."

So T. J. boosted the mermaid to his saddle and then climbed up right behind her.

T. J.'s Crosstrack Ranch at this time was a blackjack outfit. For every three clumps of bluestem it had a blackjack, or a white oak, or a hickory or a sycamore. T. J.'s headquarters occupied

the only open spot on the place. They consisted of a sandstone and pole shack, a set of corrals, and a haybarn. T. J. set the mermaid down at the hitchrail before the shack.

"Where's the cowboys?" the mermaid asked, looking around the bare yard.

"Honey," T. J. admitted, "I ain't got but one cowboy. That's Johnny White Tail. He ain't here now, I reckon—I sent him checking on the calf crop. He'll be in for supper, though."

"You mean you've only got *one* man around here?"

The mermaid glared.

"Oh, hell, no," T. J. reassured her hurriedly. "There's the neighbors. One in particular. Deacon Charley Smith. He comes around most every night to drink rotgut whisky. You'll like Charley, honey."

"Well, that's different." The mermaid was slightly mollified. "All right, T. J. Got anything to eat?"

T. J. showed the mermaid the cookstove and the pantry where he kept beans and flour. He took her to the spring house where he had a haunch of beef. Then he left her to cook supper while he sat around outside and smoked his pipe and thought his thoughts.

Now T. J.'s thoughts were like everything else about T. J., wicked and regrettable, but extremely human. T. J. had the mermaid on his mind; he had certain very definite plans.

Presently the mermaid called him to a steak and bean and biscuit supper. The steak was done to a turn, and if it had a slightly fishy taste, T. J. pretended not to notice, because he wanted to get on the good side of the mermaid. Finally he laid down his fork and grunted. The mermaid, sitting across the table, put her chin in her hand and her eyes took on a hungry look.

"Tell me about this Deacon Charley Smith, T. J."

T. J. closed one eye and deliberated a moment, wondering whether to be frank with the mermaid. It was not T. J.'s nature to be frank; he much preferred to tell a lie. But in this case he decided reluctantly that frankness might pay.

"To tell the truth," T. J. began, "Deacon Charley is sort of in my way, honey. He come in here three years ago and parked on my grass with a bunch of scrawny Arkansaw cattle. I need the pasture, but I can't move him off, because it's really free range."

"Why don't you salivate him, T. J.?" the mermaid asked. "Shoot him with your six-guns? You're a salty bad man of the Old West, aren't you?"

"I sure am, honey," T. J. said. "I'm salty as Utah! But I can't go around salivating deacons in the church. I got my reputation to think of."

"How do you think I can help?"

T. J. grinned. "You want a man, don't you? Deacon Charley Smith is all man, I'll have to admit that."

"Doesn't he already have a wife?" the mermaid asked.

"Uh-huh. Confidentially, I think that's why he's a deacon. His wife's a bearcat, honey. She's the only thing on earth Deacon Charley's scared of. But you could vamp him."

The mermaid looked doubtful. "I don't know, T. J. Remember I'm inexperienced. I've never vamped anybody before, but sailors. And you can vamp a sailor with a hunk of seaweed on a broomstick. You want to give me some pointers?"

"You don't need no pointers, honey,"

T. J. smirked. "Just act natural."

"Oh," the mermaid said. "Well, that's easy. I do that all the time."

T. J. grunted and shook his head. He wondered if the water in the ocean had addled the mermaid's brains, or if she'd never had any from the time she was a tadpole.

"While we're waiting you could get a little experience on me, honey," he said. "I wouldn't object."

But T. J. was out of luck, this time, because just as the mermaid got puckered up and was ready to apply her voltage, the door swung open and Deacon Charley strode in, carrying a Bible.

Deacon Charley Smith was a two-gun character, rough as a corncob and about as pretty. He had a black beard and a saintly look in his eye and he was six feet five and one-half inches tall.

T. J. whooped, "Come on in, Deacon, and set down your Bible. Meet up with a friend of mine."

Deacon Charley Smith bowed gravely to the mermaid. He straddled a chair and laid his Bible on the table. He said in a deep voice:

"Am I too early, T. J. For the—uh—refreshments?"

"I got something better'n rotgut whisky for you tonight, Deacon," T. J. said slyly. "I got you a mermaid." Then T. J. nudged the mermaid with his elbow and whispered out of the corner of his mouth, "He's all yours, honey. Hook up them batteries."

The mermaid nodded and moved toward Deacon Charley Smith. Deacon Charley looked at her apprehensively, fingering his beard.

"Stand up, Deacon," the mermaid said.

Deacon Charley stood up, a puzzled expression on his face. The mermaid smiled sweetly and put her arms around the deacon and kissed him. T. J. could tell from the way she went at it that the kiss was somewhat experimental.

But it couldn't have seemed experimental to the deacon. His face became a rich, healthy purple. He broke away from the mermaid, spluttering, and glanced fearfully around the shack.

"T. J., my wife'd murder me for this. Look, if this is your way of tricking me into leaving the country—getting me kissed by this—this painted hussy with her saloon morals—"

"She ain't painted, Deacon," T. J. said complacently. "And she ain't got saloon morals, neither. She ain't got no morals at all. They don't need 'em where she come from."

"Well, call her off. I—I'm a church member, T. J. Besides, you know what a bearcat my wife is. Call her off."

T. J. sighed and said, "Shut off the batteries, honey."

The mermaid turned and stared at T. J. indignantly. It was plain that her batteries were pretty highly charged; she didn't want to shut them off. But T. J. winked at her and jerked his head sideways, and at last she retreated sulkily.

Now it was part of T. J.'s plan to work up a good kissing session between Deacon Charley Smith and the mermaid. So he didn't say a word, but he went to the two windows of the shack and pulled down the blinds. He shut the door, and he turned the lamp down to a dim glow. Then he said craftily:

"Nobody can see inside now, Deacon. Look, maybe you don't understand that this here is a real, genuine, forty-carat mermaid."

T. J. told the deacon how he'd found the mermaid, how he was helping her get experience with men. He colored the story a little. He painted a word picture of how cold it was down in the ocean, with nothing but fish and an occasional sailor who'd been swept overboard. He told the deacon there was a merman shortage, and that the competition among the poor mermaids was terrific. If this little girl, he said, putting his hand on the mermaid's shoulder and working a fake sob into his voice, didn't get more experience someplace, she wouldn't be able to compete. She'd be forced to marry an electric eel, who might give her security, all right, but that wasn't the thing every girl's heart craved. That wasn't love.

Now, T. J., of course, was an expert liar, even in those days. Moreover, he knew how to fit his lies to the person he was lying to. He kept on in that vein, telling Deacon Charley he was a hard-hearted wretch to deny the mermaid the experience she needed so badly. Telling him a man who was a deacon in the church ought to have more human kindliness and sympathy. Pretty soon T. J. had the deacon gulping. The deacon wiped his nose with a red handkerchief.

"I—uh—nobody can say I ain't got no human kindness, T. J. It's only—you know my wife." Deacon Charley shuddered.

"Nobody's going to snitch, Deacon. You're safe as if you was in church." T. J. judged he had got the deacon sufficiently softened. He winked at the mermaid. "Get natural some more, honey."

So the mermaid got natural again. This time, after a little hesitation, the deacon cooperated. T. J. stood around and watched, grinning craftily. Now it was true, as T. J. had told the mermaid, that Deacon Charley was all man. After about ten minutes it became evident that both the mermaid and Deacon Charley had gotten so natural that they wouldn't notice what he was doing. Moving quietly, T. J. slipped up behind the mermaid who stood in Deacon Charley's arms.

Deacon Charley was both strong and big. He had gotten so interested in his kissing by this time that he'd lifted the mermaid clear off the floor, but neither of them had noticed that. So it was easy for T. J. to stoop over and lift off one of the mermaid's slippers.

It was a dainty little yellow slipper, with high heels. Chuckling wickedly, T. J. tiptoed outside and deposited the slipper in Deacon Charley Smith's saddlebags.

Back inside the shack, T. J. waited about ten minutes more, until he concluded that the deacon had had about all the naturalness he could take. T. J. got hold of the mermaid and tried to drag her out of the deacon's arms. The deacon didn't want to let go.

Finally T. J. heard a noise in the corrals outside, which he knew was his one hired hand, Johnny White Tail, coming home. T. J. grabbed the deacon's elbow and pinched hard and shouted in the deacon's ear.

"Somebody in the corrals. Couldn't be your wife, deacon, could it?"

The deacon's richly hued face went white. The deacon moved. One minute he was standing there with his arms around the mermaid; next he had grabbed his Bible off the table and his horse was hitting the road at a high gallop, hoofbeats fading into the distance.

"Why'd you run him off, T. J.?" the

mermaid asked. "I still had some batteries left to hook up."

T. J. wanted to hold his sides and guffaw so much he almost split. But he didn't. It wouldn't do to let the mermaid know he'd played a trick on Deacon Charley. So he kept sober and said:

"Johnny White Tail's coming in. You can get some more practice, honey."

The door swung open, then, and Johnny White Tail entered.

Johnny White Tail was a blanket Indian of obscure parentage. Under his blanket he wore a tattered cotton shirt and pants, and a mothy eagle feather. He was tall; he seemed mostly bones and somber black eyes. He had no brains, to speak of.

When he entered, Johnny's glance fell on the mermaid. Instantly Johnny became as wooden as if he'd been standing in front of a tobacco store with a handful of cigars.

T. J. said, "Johnny, this here's a mermaid, which I don't suppose you ever heard tell of." And to the mermaid, "Honey, this ain't very promising material, but it's okay for you to practice on, ain't it?"

"After that other gorgeous man," the mermaid said, "this doesn't look like much. But you're right, T. J. I need experience. I'll try anything once."

And she did. She sidled over to Johnny White Tail and flipped her switch.

T. J. said he never could understand how Johnny did it, but all through that kiss Johnny kept acting like a wooden Indian. Johnny didn't move, except his eyes, which slid past the mermaid's red hair and across to T. J. There was something pleading in Johnny's eyes.

When it was over, the mermaid stepped back and regarded Johnny with a puzzled look. "I saw him move, T. J.," the mermaid said, "but that was ten minutes ago. Is he dead?"

"Only in the head, honey," T. J. answered soothingly. "Give him time. Let him eat his supper first."

T. J. went outside to take a scout while Johnny was eating supper. He poked around the barn and the corrals, then he lit his pipe and hunkered in the lee of a blackjack, waiting. For T. J. had a hunch that when Deacon Charley Smith got home, and his wife found that slipper in his saddlebag, things were going to start exploding. T. J. didn't want to be in the shack then. He wanted Johnny White Tail to be there.

But an hour later, nothing had happened except that the full moon had risen, flooding the blackjacks with silver. T. J. went back inside.

In the shack, T. J. found that Johnny White Tail had turned wooden again. Only this time he had stretched out on the floor to do it. Johnny was sound asleep.

The mermaid stamped her foot and glared at T. J. angrily. "T. J., I've figured out something this Indian is good for. You can lay him across a couple of saw horses and make a table out of him. But that doesn't help me any. Get me the deacon back, blast it!"

T. J. didn't answer right off. He'd heard a sound from the barn. He cocked his ear and listened, and presently a gunshot crashed outside. A bullet smashed through the door and whined off the cast-iron stove.

T. J. said, "I think you got him back, honey. Only he's mad."

From outside, a huge voice roared savagely, "Come out, T. J.! Come out and fight like a man, confound you for a sneaking polecat!"

T. J. grinned wickedly at the mermaid. He sneaked to a window and lifted the blind with extreme care. Deacon Charley Smith stood in the barn yard, illumined by moonlight. Deacon Charley had one arm in an impromptu sling and a streak of dried blood ran down from his hair and across his face. In his good hand Deacon Charley held a six-gun.

T. J. dropped the window blind and chuckled. "The deacon's wife had more artillery on hand than I figured. Honey, you and me better vamoose, or we're apt to get salivated."

The mermaid stamped her foot again—the one without the slipper. "I don't want to vamoose, T. J. I want me that man. Why don't you salivate *him* —just a little, where it won't hurt him much?"

T. J. looked at the mermaid reproachfully. "Honey, I couldn't salivate no deacon. You know it ain't respectable."

"All right," the mermaid sighed. "But maybe he'll follow us. Maybe I can get him yet."

"Maybe you can," T. J. said, and he booted Johnny White Tail awake. "Come on, Johnny. Skeedadle out the back door. Women and Injuns first."

Johnny White Tail rolled to his feet with a sleepy grunt. Johnny didn't ask questions, because he seldom questioned any of T. J.'s orders. He went out the back door and the mermaid followed. When T. J. saw that neither of them drew the deacon's fire, he slipped out, too. Five minutes later they were in the blackjacks. Behind them, the shack door splintered as Deacon Charley Smith smashed it, vengeance-bent.

"I'll take the lead now," T. J. whispered. "A man like me always takes the dangerous end of the job. If we can just get across the creek, we can shake him."

T. J. heard the mermaid laugh softly, then. The mermaid said, "We'll never get across that creek, T. J. If I can't get what I want, I'll take what I can get."

T. J. said he should have been warned by that, but he was a little worried by Deacon Charley's close pursuit, so he kept on snaking through the blackjacks. He hit the creek running, hearing a splash behind him as Johnny White Tail entered the water. T. J. crossed the creek, and he was just about to climb out the other side when a cannon seemed to go off in T. J.'s head.

Next thing T. J. knew, he was in the water. And although T. J. had always hated water, he found to his astonishment that he didn't hate it this time. Instead, it seemed natural that he'd be here, and he seemed to be breathing, even though he was swimming under water.

Being a quick-witted man, T. J. realized instantly what had happened to him. But he couldn't prevent the quick wave of horror as he looked down—or rather backward—at himself.

The mermaid was taking what she could get. She had changed T. J. into a catfish.

"Johnny White Tail was there, too," T. J. said, "He was a catfish, just like me. Only skinnier, of course, and not as handsome. And the mermaid had changed back to her old original self. So what do you think I done then, son?"

I shook my head. I took another snort of tarantula milk. I'd been nibbling at the jug as T. J. went along, and it was about half empty, and I

was about three-quarters full. But it wasn't enough.

I said, "T. J., this tarantula milk don't do what they claim. I think I'll get my money back."

T. J. had a triumphant gleam in his eye. "Can't help it if you don't believe it, son. It's the truth. There I was, a catfish. And pretty soon, here come Deacon Charley ripsnorting up to the bank. It was shallow water, so he could see us plain in all that moonlight. You know what Charley done, son?"

I said, "No, T. J., I don't know what he done."

T. J. chuckled. "That Deacon sized up the situation quick. And he was smart enough to figure what to do. He dug down in his pockets and pulled up a piece of string. There was a fence close by; he rigged a hook out of a strand of wire. He got him a white grub-worm from under a rock. Then Deacon Charley sat down on the bank and started to fish.

"Well," T. J. went on, "I was just as quick-witted a catfish as I am a man. I saw what the deacon was after, of course. But you know, son, somehow that grub-worm seemed plumb appetizing, all of a sudden. I bit the hook."

I took another snort of tarantula milk and leaned back in my chair and stared at T. J. I couldn't think of anything to say; if I could have thought of something, T. J. would have topped it.

"Deacon Charley started pulling in his string," T. J. said. "Wasn't but one thing for me to do. I set my fins and began to swim backwards, hell for leather. Son, I was a real he-catfish, if I do say so.

"Deacon Charley was hampered some by his crippled arm. Besides that, he had never met up with a catfish as determined as I was. And besides that, the mermaid swam over and reached an arm out of the water and grabbed the deacon by the foot. Between us, we got him in the creek.

"And then," T. J. said, "next thing I knew I was standing on the bank, my own natural handsome self again. Johnny White Tail was beside me. I looked into the creek, and there was the mermaid wrapping her arms around the biggest, ugliest, most ferocious-looking catfish a man ever laid eyes on. That catfish, son, was the deacon."

T. J. grinned, looking as wicked as the mother of sin.

"That was the last anybody heard of the deacon around these parts. His wife sold the Arkansaw cattle and moved to California. But the funny thing, son, was what happened ten years later. I was fishing in that same creek, when something grabbed onto my line. I pulled out the fish and got a stick, fixing to knock it in the head. Just in time I recognized it. It was the deacon."

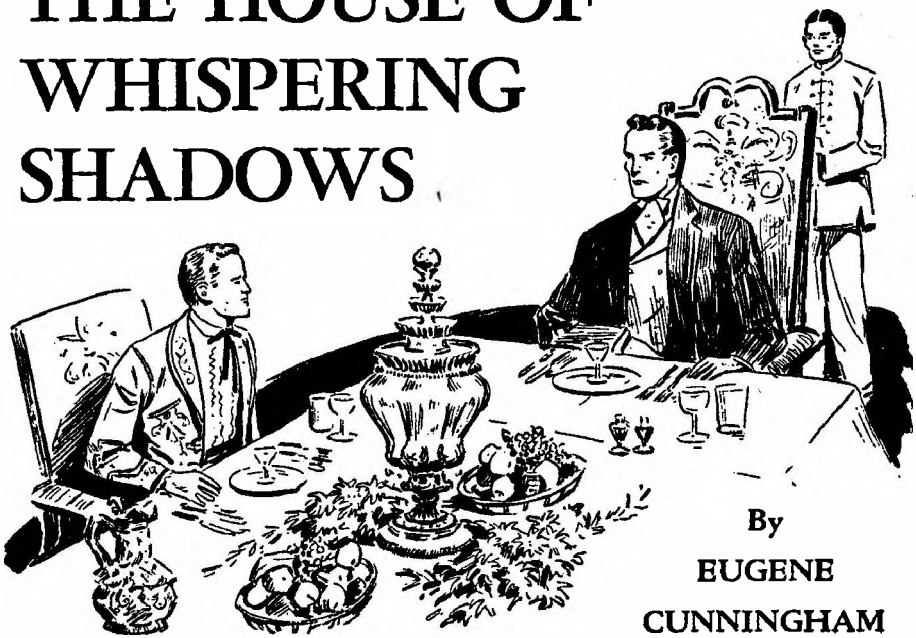
I said, "You sure it was the same catfish?"

T. J. nodded. "I told you I *recognized* him. He had the same saintly look he'd always had. I held him in my hands and tried to make him talk. He couldn't talk, but I'll swear he looked at me with a pleading in his eyes. And you know what I done?"

"T. J.," I said, horrified. "You didn't eat that catfish?"

"Nope." T. J. shook his head and grinned that grin of his. "I remembered how ornery the deacon had been about runnin' his Arkansaw cattle on my grass. I remembered he'd tried to salivate me. And son," T. J. said, "I *still* throwed that catfish back."

THE HOUSE OF WHISPERING SHADOWS



By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

CAPEN'S BIG RANCH HOUSE *is reputedly an evil place, and Ware finds its reputation well deserved. A Ranger novelette, first published in* Frontier Stories *in 1928.*

THE country north of Las Tunas is flat, yellow desert, dappled with the varying shades of green found in yucca, greasewood, tornillo, ocotilla and prickly pear; it is hemmed in on either hand by savage, red-black mountains as grim as the faces of the Apaches who once made the rugged canyons their fortresses; through the flat the river runs in a narrow belt of green and thorny *bosque*.

Ware, who upon a time had served as temporary city marshal of Las Tunas, knew the country vaguely. So he frowned forbodingly when he had finished the letter from Captain Knowles, brought to his hand by the Mexican youth who was often the captain's messenger.

Theo' Ribaut was vanished, the captain wrote, gone as if the earth—or yellow sand—had swallowed him, taking at the same gulp the buckboard and span of little Mexican mules, with little Theo'—Ribaut's ten-year-old son—and seven thousand six hundred dollars. The Ribaut family had searched vainly for trace of them, old Theo' and little Theo', when they failed to return from La Piedra. Now, they asked Ranger assistance of Captain Knowles, an old acquaintance of Theo' Ribaut.

"An' I got to go wanderin' through that desert lookin' for a sand dune that might have Ribaut's body—an' the kid's —underneath it!" Ware said helplessly

in English. "A' right! *Muy bien!*" he grunted to Antonio, the messenger.

"Go you back to *mi capitán.* Say that I ride now for Los Alamos to do all that a man may to make this mystery clear. But if Ribaut had with him so much money—why, certainly he is dead, now. Remains but to try to find the manner of his dying and the names of those who killed him."

He saddled up—Antonio had found him in camp—and turned Rocket's head south and east toward a pass he had heard of in the Soldados range. It was a lonely land, savage and sinister, that he rode through for days, lucky to find water holes every day, making many a dry camp, living off the prong-horn antelopes and rabbits killed with the little Winchester carbine.

He crossed the river and went on east, guided now by the directions given him by a Mexican rider who had seemed not too anxious to answer questions. The ranch of Carlos Smith—the D-Bar-D—lay at the head of Wood Creek, said this tawny-skinned, ever-watchful rider. No more than a short two-days ride. Here, he added, a man might go on eastward to the settlement of La Piedra.

"La Piedra!" said Ware to himself, with narrowing of gray-green eyes that sent the Mexican's hand creeping toward a bulge beneath his *zarape.* "La Piedra! Hell! I'm gittin' onto Ol' Man Theo' Ribaut's trail! He was s'posed to be comin' home from La Piedra."

He grinned at the Mexican. "You may take your hand off that pistol, *amigo mio!* I have no quarrel with you. Indeed, I thank you most kindly for your directions. A sad business, that of the Señor Ribaut, no?"

It seemed to him that the tawny face almost altered; that there was a flashing change instantly checked, to tell—what? That was the trouble, Ware thought. A Mexican who had reasons for not desiring his every activity to be bared would act as this one did at mention of Ribaut's name, for fear of having to account for himself and in proving innocence of complicity in Ribaut's disappearance prove guilt of something else. Ribaut's murderer would act the same, because of fear.

"The Señor Ribaut?" shrugged the Mexican, lighting a corn-husk cigarette with airy gesture. "*Si,* a bad business—if the señor says so."

With that he bowed courteously and rammed his big spurs into the bony sides of his pony. Ware watched him go, grinning a little—but not good-humoredly. For he knew Mexicans and this was doubtless an indicator of what he would encounter on every hand when he began investigating Ribaut's fate.

Going on toward the D-Bar-D he mulled over what he knew of Theo' Ribaut. It was not much. He wished Captain Knowles had thought to include more information about the politician in his letter.

Ribaut was a man of mysterious antecedents. He had been known to hint, when in liquor, that his name was an old and famous one, somewhere back East. He was a lawyer, but more politician than attorney. In this frontier country his shrewdness, his education, had made of him a man standing head and shoulders above most. His manners, Ware had heard, were those of a courtier; he was a welcome guest at the finest homes of Las Tunas—and he had married a slatternly Mexican woman.

Partly through drink and partly because of more competition as the land

grew tamer and attracted more men of education, Ribaut had for three or four years now been losing his grip. Where he had been second, if not first, in political circles, of late he had been barely able to control his own town of Los Alamos; investments, too, had seemed to fail him. He was no longer rich.

All this, Ware had gotten here and there from chance-dropped remarks of men over a great sweep of country. He wished, now, as he jogged up to Carlos Smith's adobe ranch house on Wood Creek that he had taken pains to learn more. He reined in Rocket and looked with interest at the bare dooryard of the D-Bar-D with its squat, fortlike house and rows of adobe cabins behind it, all shaded by giant cottonwoods.

"Howdy!" said an apparent Mexican almost at his side, appearing soundlessly from the shelter of a log corral. "Yuh look like as if yuh'd rid a piece, so light an' rest yo'se'f."

Ware eyed the man curiously as he swung down. In every detail of feature and dress the *pela'o*, laboring, Mexican, still his language was that of the cowpuncher, even to the lazy Texan drawl.

"I'm Smith—Carlos Smith," said the man with flash of teeth. "Yuh thought I was a Mex', o' course. Well, I'm half. The ol' man drifted down to this-yere country an' squatted on Wood Creek. That was thirty year ago. He couldn't find a white woman nowheres handy in them days, so he hiked over to Rancheria, the settlement sou'west o' yere, an' got Ma."

"Glad to meet yuh!" grinned Ware. "I'm headin' for Los Alamos an' one o' yo' boys I run into this side the river, he said I might's well come over here an' git some grub before I struck south."

"No boy o' mine," shrugged Carlos Smith. "I work two-three hands—all Mex' vaqueros—an' they're all on my east range. Do' know who it could've been yuh met."

Ware knew instinctively that he was lying, but inwardly he grinned. There was more than a little smuggling in this region and if Carlos Smith were mixing in it that was nothing to him.

"Do' know, either," he said indifferently. "Bad business about ol' Theo' Ribaut, wasn't it?"

"Sho' was!" nodded Smith. "They tell me—couple fellas from Los Alamos that come lookin' fer him—that I must've been the last'n' to see Theo'—except them that downed him. If," he added with a knowing grin, "he was downed."

"Yuh don't think they's any doubt o' that?" Ware said artfully. "Way I heard it, t'other side the Soldados, somebody killed him an' the boy as they was comin' back from La Piedra. He had a lot o' money in his buckboard, they say."

"Seventy-six hund'd an' fawty dollars," nodded Smith. "I ought to know; I paid it to him right yere in this house an' took back my mortgage. Sho' glad I done it, too. The money was due the next day an' if I'd had to monkey around tryin' to find out who to pay it to, now, some law shark might've found a way to say my place was forfeit. It's worth twict the money, too."

He gestured toward the house and they went into the cool dusk of the front room, where Smith called to someone in the rear to make a meal ready. Ware was going back to take care of Rocket, but Smith checked him and sent a boy to put the animal in the corral.

"Si' down!" he cried genially. "It's

sho' fine to have somebody driftin' in to augur with. I don't see many folks. Ol' Theo', he came through yere an' collected the money from me, then went on to La Piedra. Then he came back an' stopped overnight—him an' the boy an' a Mex' I never see before. A week or so after, up come Jud Bingham an' Whiskers Logan from Los Alamos a-lookin' fer him. An' yuh're the next'n to drift in."

Coming to the job that faced him, Ware felt innate suspicion of everyone who might have had the slightest connection with the Ribaut affair. Now, he wondered if this recountal of Smith's, with its detail, were artless or artful; the indirect alibi of one who knew a good deal, or merely the garrulous talk of a man much alone. But nothing showed in Ware's blank face, his greenish eyes, of what he studied.

"Funny the ol' man'd collect the money from yuh an' then go to La Piedra an' then bring it back with him," he said absently. "Looks like he'd have dodged all that packin' an' left it with yuh till he was ready to hit for home."

"He wanted to!" grinned Carlos Smith and closed an eye knowingly. "But me, I knowed that ol' fox too damn well, I did! Time he got back yere, yuh see, the due date'd be passed by an' he'd likely have grinned at me an' refused to take the money. So I made him gi' me back my mortgage an' take the money. Then, I told him he could hide the sack some'r's around till he come back. Nah! I knowed the ol' devil too well, Ware! I ain't sayin' he was too crooked to sleep in ary hawss corral in the country, fer I ain't seen all the hawss corrals. But he was too foxy fer me to take a chanct with."

So, thought Ware, Carlos Smith knew him; had known him ever since he rode up. Thoughtfully he glanced at the wide, bullion-trimmed sombrero hanging on a peg beside the door they had come through. It was not surprising to find himself recognized, after all; the Mexican sombrero, the short jacket of soft-tanned goatskin with its bunch of flowers embroidered on the back, the wide-bottomed trousers with scarlet insert at the outer seam—these were a uniform such as no other Ranger wore at present.

But why had not Smith voiced his recognition directly, voiced it in the beginning, instead of letting it show now by inadvertent use of his name? It might mean nothing, of course, but Ware was trained to hunt for trifles as well as large indicators, in the business of crime-solving.

"I've heard old Theo's pretty sudden in his dealin's," he nodded. "I never fancied these political pups a lot. Ribaut was always huntin' some gov'ment job that'd give him good pay with no work an' lots o' influence. I've heard about a thing or two he done by havin' some sort o' loop over somebody. That kind o' business don't set level on my stomach."

"My idee, too!" cried Carlos Smith. "He was packin' more secrets, I reckon, than anybody had a right to know. Me, I'm a good Democrat; same's Pa was. Ribaut, he was a blame' Republican an' so I never had much dealin' with him. But I reckon he knew somethin' about a lot o' Democrats—the politicians."

"What made yuh say yuh didn't really believe he was dead?" Ware asked suddenly. But Smith only lifted a shoulder in the Mexican fashion, his face quite unperturbed.

"Shucks! Ol' Theo' wasn't so easy

handled as yuh might figure to look at him. He packed two sixes under his arms an' he never needed no day's notice to git 'em out, neither! An' he could do fancy-work with 'em, too, onct he got 'em out. He went to Las Tunas one time after a Mex' an' the city marshal delivered the fella to Theo'. Goin' back on the stage the Mex' grabbed a gun off'n a fella an' brought her down *slo-ow*, grinnin' like a tawm-cat, yuh know. An' Theo', he pulled a gun an' punctured that-'ere Mex' three times an' done her before the Mex' could shoot!"

"I know all about that deal," said Ware sardonically. "The gun the Mex' grabbed was empty an' the fella he grabbed it off was a hired hand o' Theo's; the Mex' was let to grab the gun."

"Well, mebbe so. Anyway, Theo' was cat-eyed. Looks funny to me that anybody could've got the drop on him. An' if he was took by surprise, he'd still have got him a lunch out o' the fellas that bushwhacked him. An' looky yere, Ware! The ol' devil was about at the end o' his twine, around yere. He was sittin' in the buckboard with seventy-six hund'd an' fawty dollars an' the wide world before him. He knowed the' was men around yere that'd like a chanct to kill him, because o' what he'd done to 'em, or knowed about 'em. S'pose he just drove on."

"Can happen! Seems like, to me, yuh was lucky to have the money to pay him, Smith."

"Lucky, hell!" cried Carlos Smith. "I damn nigh went down onto my marrer bones to ol' Clem Tooley, at La Piedra, to borrer it off'n him. He's got a mortgage on the D-Bar-D today that sticks tighter'n ary mustard plaster yuh ever see! An' it ain't fer but one year, too; interest a-runnin' fifteen per cent. Man, I just jumped out o' one jackpot into a tighter'n'."

"*Comida!*" announced a Mexican woman, appearing in a dusky rear doorway.

"Le's go git it!" said Smith, getting up.

Lying on his cot that night, Ware lay long awake. It seemed to him that the theory advanced by Carlos Smith was plausible enough; Theo' Ribaut might well have decided to leave this country where—beyond doubt—he had about played out his hand. Men had been known to disappear forever in this wide land, with even less cause than had Ribaut.

But a plausible theory was by no means a probable explanation. Ribaut might have analyzed his situation and decided that it was hopeless—and downright dangerous. But, on the other hand, he might just as logically have clung to the hope, so typical of a politician, of putting over a coup that would seat him again in power. If this last supposition were truth, then there remained the other possibilities Ware had seen from the beginning.

Ribaut might have been waylaid and murdered for the money Smith said he carried away from the D-Bar-D; he might have been murdered by political enemies and robbed as a matter of incident.

Smith's story, plausible enough in all its detail, was still worth nothing in the investigation unless its truth could be indubitably established. So, instead of heading for Los Alamos in the morning, he must ride to La Piedra and have a talk with this Clem Tooley, who had loaned Carlos Smith the money to meet Ribaut's claim against

the D-Bar-D.

Suddenly he thought of something Smith had said—the unknown Mexican who had come back in the buckboard with the Ribauts. This was the first mention he had heard of such a one. It might well prove to be explanation of the whole mystery. A third person—also vanished—could answer everything!

He was up at the first sound of shuffling feet about the house. Carlos Smith ate breakfast with him and came outside to watch him saddle Rocket. A Mexican woman brought cooked food to put in Ware's saddlebags.

"Goin' to Los Alamos, huh?" said Smith conversationally. "Well, yuh can stop tonight at the House o' Whisperin' Shadows."

"Stop where?" grunted Ware, staring down at Smith.

"The House o' Whisperin' Shadows—Capen's place. The house he built on the ol' Open A ranch."

"How-come they call it that?" inquired Ware. Nicknames in this country were apt to have meaning.

"Oh, Capen's a queer hombre in lots o' ways," shrugged Smith. "Foreigner o' some kind, but he talks good as anybody. Drifted into this country twenty year or so back; won the Open A off'n young Al Twombley an' built this big house on it. The Mex' are skeered to hang 'round it much; they say the spirits dance underneath it."

"Capen. Capen," mused Ware. "New to me. What's his first name?"

"Got none! Which is just another one o' the queer things about him. He just signs Capen to ever'thing; always has. Right hefty among the politicos, Capen is. Goin' to be our next sher'ff an' he'll pack the whole ticket in with him. Him an' Ribaut was about the biggest politicians in the country, I reckon. Friendly enough, though, they was," he added quickly.

"I see," drawled Ware without change of expression. "Well, if I'm goin' to make La Piedra by noon, I better hightail it!"

"La Piedra! Why—why, I thought yuh was headin' fer Los Alamos about—"

"About the Ribaut business, I bet!" grinned Ware. "Well, I reckon it was a sort o' natural guess for yuh; Ribaut not showin' up an' a Ranger ridin' in would make it look like the Ranger was on that trail. But I got a li'l private job Piedra way to do. Yuh haven't had a dark-skinned bat-eared hairpin ride by, have yuh? Fella with a white scar on his neck that might call himself Barry or maybe—well, most any name?"

"Nary bit!" grinned Smith and Ware wondered if his manner had not suddenly lightened, with mention of the imaginary Barry. "'Course, a fella not anxious to be knowed might pass up a ranch house."

"Yeh, that's so. Well, if I come back by here I'll stop off. S'long."

Ware moved vaguely eastward along the faint trail and as he went, even as mechanically he studied the trail and found, here and there, the marks of buckboard wheels to prove Ribaut's passage a good while before, he mulled the puzzle of Carlos Smith. For, correctly or the reverse, Ware was suspicious of the Mexican-looking, cowboy-talking rancher.

But when he came into La Piedra and found Clem Tooley sitting like a huge Buddha on the gallery of his trading store, Tooley verified a part, at least, of the story Smith had told. Ware, sizing Tooley swiftly, had squat-

ted upon the floor near the storekeeper and introduced himself curtly. Tooley, his big face moveless as an image's, had nodded and continued to smoke lazily. When Ware had told frankly of his work and the necessity of testing each step, Tooley had nodded blankly once more, the blue eyes, half-hidden in rolls of fat, twinkling a little.

"Yeh, I loaned Carlos seventy-six hundred an' forty dollars. Took a mortgage on the D-Bar-D to cover the loan. It's worth two-three times the money, the outfit is, if I have to foreclose."

"But s'pose Carlos Smith hadn't paid the money over to Ribaut?" suggested Ware. "S'pose he'd just rammed it into his pants an' Ribaut had foreclosed?"

"Meanin' I'd have had no security? *Tchk!*" said Clem Tooley and his vast sides quivered gently. "These boys around here, they know me right well. They wouldn't none of 'em pull a dirty trick like that on old Clem Tooley—unless they was real sure, mightily sure, he was good an' dead.

"No-o, I loaned Carlos the money—chargin' him fifteen per cent because I don't like him an' never did an' couldn't abide his pa before him. I said to Carlos, 'Young fella, you pay Ribaut an' git back that mortgage. Then you bring it to me right here an' we'll tear it up. Be you sure,' I said to him, 'that you do just that'."

"What d' yuh think about Ribaut's bein' missin', yuh bein' an old-timer here?"

"Could've happened some several ways," Clem Tooley replied calmly. "Ribaut had lots o' enemies, an' some men he done dirt to when he was county attorney an' holdin' other jobs, they're real salty folks. I'd have been actin' four-eyed on the road, if I'd made as many enemies as Ribaut had. An' then, too, there's Mex' smugglers an' cow thieves runnin' hither an' yon around the country. They might have cracked down on him, just in case he had somethin' on 'em—or just in case."

"Who was the Mex' he took out o' La Piedra with him, goin' back?"

"That was the ghost o' Cortez—invisible to the nekked eye," said Clem Tooley. "He rode sittin' on the boy's lap."

"Meanin'?" inquired Ware. Clem Tooley was a man after his own heart.

"Meanin' that I was sittin' right here when Theo' Ribaut finished up a cow trade with Willard Steeves an' come by. He stopped the buckboard here an' asked me—Theo' an' me, we've been on the outs for twenty-odd year—if he could buy a plug o' Star Navy.

" 'I advertise to serve the needs an wants o' man an' beast,' I told him. 'So if I couldn't rightfully sell to you on one count, I'll let you slip in on the other—an' only charge you double what folks pay.'

"So he took his chawin' an' paid his money with his yaller teeth showin' like a wolf's. Then he licked the mules an' went straight down the trail an' I could see him for some two mile. So he never got a passenger in La Piedra."

"O' course," frowned Ware, "he could've picked a Mex' up on the road."

"Yeh, he could've, but—son, you've got a purty good name in the ol' outfit. Thirty year ago when I was Rangerin', I knowed your pa. So, I'm goin' to tell you a few things I wouldn't tell most folks an' all I want is your word you won't blab out all this or say who told you.

"A' right! Now, she don't make a bit o' never-mind to me what happened to Theo' Ribaut. Like I said, we been on the outs a long while. If we'd got just

a mite more at outs, Ribaut'd have cashed in his checks. He knowed that, too. But if I was a Ranger, now, with the job o' clearin' up the way he went out, I'd figure some on Carlos Smith—not that Carlos has the guts needful to down anybody, even from behind. Carlos, he'd be afraid the fella'd turn around!

"But Carlos an' Capen are just like dog an' master. An' Capen's a curly wolf. He'll be sher'ff o' Piedra County come election day—now that Ribaut's out o' the way with all he knowed about Capen. Capen's been mixed up into most ever'thing a man could figure—stealin' cows out o' Mexico; rustlin' his neighbors' stock; jumpin' minin' claims when the real owners went up into thin air same's Ribaut has just done; plain an' fancy murder. He's had a crew hangin' around the Open A that enough warrants could've been hung on to make 'em look like a Monday clothesline. Whenever somebody come lookin' for one o' these hairpins, word always went ahead an' Capen, he never knew a thing about the fella or about him bein' wanted.

"So, if I was a young fella about your size an' complexion, I'd figure that if Capen never saw Ribaut last, then he likely knows who did. An' figure, too, that Carlos Smith knows a heap more'n he's a-tellin'."

"Thanks!" nodded Ware, though this was more general than he had hoped for. "Yuh figure this election business was reason enough for Capen wantin' Ribaut out o' sight?"

"Plenty reason, son! But even if election wasn't comin' off, Ribaut's knowin' so much about Capen's doin's was all the same as a death warrant without a date, with Ribaut's name on it. Now, if I was you, I'd straddle that black there an' cut across country to miss the D-Bar-D an' come in along the edge o' Satan Land—that bare patch o' sand that nothin' lives on—to the Open A. Ride right up to the house an' light an' stay the night. But—be damn careful o' ever'thing you do or say. Capen's some sort o' educated furriner an' he could turn the average man plumb inside out in half an hour! Oh, he's slick! Slick as Ribaut ever was!"

Ware nodded, absently eyeing an oncoming rider a half mile away, a Mexican, apparently, who had turned into the trail at that moment and was riding toward the store. Clem Tooley picked up an old brass spyglass from the floor and trained it upon the rider, then set it down with a grunt.

"Florentino Valdez, a vaquero o' Carlos Smith's," he said. "Reckon Carlos has paid his hands—though where he'd lay onto the dinero I don't know. Wonder where Monte Murillo is that's usual Valdez's shadder? Ah!"

Again he picked up the spyglass and leveled it down the road; then nodded to himself contentedly.

"Monte's just turned into the road. They're passable fair hombres, Florentino an' Monte."

The two vaqueros came jogging on their shaggy little ponies until they drew rein before the gallery of the store. They nodded gravely to Clem Tooley.

"*Buenas tardes*, Señor Clem!"

"You two have come to buy me out?" the storekeeper asked solemnly, in Spanish as smooth as their own. "One moment; I will have that lazy Manuel move the shelves out here where you may the more easily take my stock away."

"No, no!" grinned the taller of the

two. "Not today, señor. When Monte and I have made our fortunes, we will do that. Today, we wish only the tins of peaches and Monte desires that neckerchief of red which he has admired so long. For me, I like the color green and so I will have the neckerchief of that color."

They swung down and dropped their ponies' reins and came at rolling horseman's gait into the store. Clem Tooley waddled in before them and Ware continued to squat upon the gallery and puzzle the complications which seemed to grow more tangled as he considered this disappearance of the cunning Theo' Ribaut.

Twenty minutes or so went by, then the two vaqueros came back outside, both carrying a large, opened can of peaches in each hand. They moved down the store wall and sat comfortably in a shady place. Clem Tooley waddled out and resumed his huge chair. He exhaled a cloud of bluish smoke and regarded Ware calmly.

"Look at this!" he grunted softly, extending his hand.

Ware stared; in the big palm lay a tattered five-dollar bill and a gold piece of the same value. There was absolutely nothing about the note to attract attention, but after a second, he noted that around the edge of the coin the gold was brighter than in the center; it had a sort of rim of clean, untarnished gold.

"Somebody's spendin' his watch charm," he said, then lifted narrowed eyes to Clem Tooley. Something was behind this, he knew.

"Somebody's spendin' *somebody's* watch charm," corrected Clem Tooley and into his half-hidden blue eyes leaped a sudden light that illuminated for Ware in a flash the true caliber of this lazy-seeming fat man. "Last time I saw that gold piece, son, she was hangin' onto Theo' Ribaut's watch chain. The bill is one o' the fives I give Carlos Smith on that loan I made him. I'm a downright funny jigger, son; born thataway. I just naturally see things an' remember 'em."

Ware's slim, brown hand went up in characteristic gesture to his chin; the fingers tap-tapped his lips and he whistled softly to himself. Slowly, levelly, then, his eyes, showing a greenish flame, went to the two Mexicans who sat in the shadow of the wall, cramming the halves of peaches into their mouths, talking lazily, laughing now and then.

"Florentino Valdez, he says Smith gave 'em this money," Clem Tooley drawled. "That is, he says Carlos paid 'em couple days ago."

"Which leaves the gate open for a couple chances," frowned Ware. "Either Carlos Smith stuck up Ribaut an' robbed an' done away with him, or those two hairpins yonder turned the trick."

"*Umhmm*," nodded Clem Tooley. "If you wanted a lot o' glory with no trouble, all you'd have to do would be arrest Valdez an' Murillo an' charge 'em with Ribaut's murder an' robbery. Carlos Smith'd deny givin' 'em this money an' they got no witnesses to prove he did. Seems they was out on the range when Carlos rode up an' paid 'em each ten dollars—their month's pay. An' they was ridin' range together on the day Ribaut left the D-Bar-D. Looks right black for 'em."

"Does, kind o'," Ware agreed. "An', too, rep'tations have been built up in this country on just that kind o' deal. But I draw pay for findin' out the truth about things so far's I can, not

for buildin' up a big rep'. I'd be a damn sight better off if nobody knowed I was alive—or a Ranger. What d' yuh figure?"

"Why, either way it might've happened. I don't figure Carlos has got nerve enough to've done the job. An' I've knowed these two Mex' a long time. I've always believed 'em average honest an' good-hearted. Either guess is like to be wrong, o' course. Still, I kind o' stick to my reckonin' in spite o' all!"

"A' right," said Ware quietly, getting up. "Hang onto them exhibits an' I'll yell for 'em when they're wanted. Reckon we can lay onto these fellas if we need 'em. Me, I'm hightailin' it across country. Reckon I'll go listen to them shadows whisperin'."

"S'long," grunted Clem Tooley. "An', son," he drawled cryptically, "if you ride back up this way, you'll see me an', even if you don't, maybe you'll see me anyhow."

Ware nodded, if somewhat blankly, then reined Rocket around when he had mounted. But suddenly he pulled in again and once more faced the storekeeper.

"These two fellas that the Ribaut family sent huntin' Theo'—they go back to Los Alamos?"

"Yeh. Went back to say they never found nothin'. But Teresa Ribaut—the gal, you know—she sent 'em out again an' they're roamin' around the landscape some'r's, right now. Jud Bingham an' Whiskers Logan. Two downright serious boys, too. That Whiskers, he's half-Comanche an' if he can't smell out a track, nobody can. Tell you, son, if I'd buried anybody in the sou'-west end o' the state o' Texas an' never wanted that there corpse found, I'd shore-ly hope Whiskers Logan'd die before he come nigh the place!"

"I see," nodded Ware and again spurred away into the south.

Satan Land Ware thought well-named. Forty to fifty miles the yellow sand stretched away to southward, a sinister, utterly silent waste that was like a lake the turgid waters of which had been solidified. The wind-carved dunes curled up around cactus and stunted greasewood, threatening to overwhelm even these poor manifestations of life, as if resentful that anything could live in their midst. The rattlesnakes, even, seemed to come out of Satan Land to find their food; their looping or dragging trails were many.

The faint trail of horsemen led along the edge of the sands. Ware rode with mind busy. It would be easy to take those two simple-seeming vaqueros who spent money of Ribaut's. But that would not settle the mystery unless Carlos Smith's connection, or lack of connection, with the crime could be established beyond a doubt. And if he had paid the two vaqueros the money Clem Tooley had recognized, but denied that, nothing could be proved.

He drew up suddenly, in late afternoon. At the edge of the faint track he followed was a rut in the soft earth beside a reef of rock. He stared hard; if that were not the trail of a wheel—He studied the track; it had no fellow, as a wheeled vehicle should have, no faintest sign of a second rut anywhere.

He was well south of the D-Bar-D now. Very soon he should be reaching the Open A of the mysterious, powerful, sinister Capen, master of the House of Whispering Shadows. It occurred to him, remembering all his talk with Carlos Smith, that the half-breed rancher had somehow given him

the impression that Theo' Ribaut, leaving the D-Bar-D on the return trip to Los Alamos, had gone south over the main trail well to westward of Satan Land that moved toward the river by way of The Notch, the pass in the Blancos.

Perhaps Carlos Smith had not said definitely that Ribaut's buckboard had gone that way, instead of this lonelier, but shorter trail, but certainly Ware had come away with that idea. And yet —here was the track of a buckboard. The absence of the other rut was perhaps proof of nothing, yet suppose someone had wished to remove all evidence of the buckboard's passing this way; suppose this interested person had wiped out the buckboard wheel ruts, but had missed this one wheel track—

He shrugged and spurred on and inside the hour, without having seen any other trace of the vehicle, any vehicle, he came to a ridge and saw, lying in a little green valley that was threaded by a creek, the mass of buildings that must be the Open A. There were adobe barracks for the cowboys and laborers, but all were overshadowed by the great, rambling bulk of the central building, the House of Whispering Shadows.

A cowboy came out of a tornillo-brake, a tanned and efficient-looking young man more than usually well-mounted. A long-barreled Colt hung low on his left side with butt to front; a well-kept carbine was in a sheath beneath his leg. He looked long and hard at Ware, then nodded.

"Howdy!" he said evenly, without warmth. "Goin' up to the house?"

"Reckon," replied Ware. "Crackers an' cheese at La Piedra was a sparrow dinner an' a long way back."

They rode down the slope in silence and crossed the creek by a heavy plank bridge. Everything about the Open A was orderly, well-built and well-tended. It was the finest place Ware had ever seen. All the 'dobes, including the House of Whispering Shadows, were smoothly whitewashed. There was no litter about the yard; indeed, before the big house itself a green lawn stretched smooth and short.

"Grass!" grunted Ware amazedly. "On a cow ranch! An' a piano player!"

The cowboy grinned slightly, but still without much humor.

"The Ol' Man," he said, "he plays a heap. A' right, if yuh fancy his kind o' music, but me, I like somethin' liver. Go on up to the house; he'll want to see yuh."

Ware rode on up and picketed his mount at the hitchrack beside a corral in the side yard, then went at awkward, horseman's gait along a graveled walk and so into the great veranda. And as he stood before the door, with the sound of approaching footsteps in the dusky interior to tell that his coming had been noted, suddenly something seemed to pour from these thick mud-brick walls, coming like a cloud-shadow across a bright prairie. It was almost as palpable as a faint, cold wind. He shivered slightly and instinctively half-turned to see if outside the late-afternoon sunlight were gone.

Then the footsteps in the doorway before him brought his eyes back around. He looked up impassively into the long, thin, waxlike face of the man who could be none other than Capen. Great, shining black eyes regarded him steadily; upon Capen's wide, almost lipless mouth hovered the very shadow of a smile which affected Ware much as had that sinister breath of the

house itself.

"Good afternoon," said Capen in a low, soft voice. "You are Ware, the Ranger, of course. You'll stay the night with me?"

"Thought I'd bunk an' eat here an' go on to Los Alamos come mornin'," nodded Ware, in no way taken aback at Capen's knowledge of him. For he thought of Carlos Smith and what Clem Tooley had said of Capen and Smith—master and dog.

"You are very welcome. Come in and I'll show you a room. I'll have your horse taken care of."

He stood aside to let Ware pass through the hall into an enormous living-room, where furniture and furnishings were an odd mixture of East and West; magnificent tapestries hanging from the green-tinted plaster walls with over them Indian baskets, war bows, tomahawks. A grand piano stood in a corner.

"Sit down," Capen invited Ware courteously and waved a long, white hand toward a great chair draped with a jaguar skin.

He took another chair, even larger, so deep that in the dusk of the room, looking across ten feet of intervening space, Ware saw nothing plainly save the white face—so pale that it made his mop of graying hair seem almost dark, by contrast. It seemed to hang in the air and again to Ware came that feeling as of a mist of evil floating out of this house and surrounding him. He was sensitive as a wild animal, almost, to these atmospheres; now, a sixth sense warned him of deadly danger. He sat like a crouching cat, ready to move like a spring uncoiled, yet without seeming tense or nervous.

"Well, what do you think of the disappearance of the esteemed Ribaut?" inquired Capen.

"Why, I've just about got it figured out," Ware answered in thoughtful drawl. "He was killed by folks that didn't like him politically—if he wasn't stuck up by somebody that wanted the money he was packin'—or captured an' held to keep him out o' the next election. That is, if he never just walked off to start all over again some'r's with the money."

Capen laughed, but as with that watchful cowboy Ware had met above the creek, there was no honest humor in the sound. And Ware felt that he was being probed, now. He moved slightly, merely to feel the touch of the Colts in the Hardin holsters beneath his arm. It was comforting to feel them there.

"But," drawled Ware, "all yuh folks are just the same. Somethin' happens in yo' neck o' the woods—like Theo' Ribaut's droppin' out o' sight. It looks real big an' important to yuh. A Ranger shows up on a trail an' right off yuh figure he can't be lookin' for anything but yo' lost man—or rustled cow! This fella Smith up the trail, he jumped thataway when I rode up."

"Then you're not on the Ribaut mystery?" Capen asked abruptly.

"Didn't Smith tell yuh I was huntin' a fella wanted for murder over at San Andres?" countered Ware, putting all the tolerant amusement possible into his tone.

"He said that you said you were," Capen nodded calmly. "But Carlos is not—overly bright. It seemed to me that you might well have been suspicious of him and so evaded admission of your real business. Personally, I have an interest in solving this mystery.

"At the next election I am a candi-

date for sheriff. I believe that in spite of anything anyone can do, I'll be elected. But in politics one does not safely take anything for granted. If Ribaut is dead, I want to know that. If smugglers—or anyone—have taken him prisoner, I want to know that, also. If he has merely decided that his race is run in this locality, again I want to know it. For he is supporting my opponent, Bridges. With his assistance, Bridges is dangerous; without—not particularly. You can see why I wish to know whether Ribaut is apt to reappear."

"Did yuh see Ribaut on his trip toward Los Alamos? I mean, did he get this far?"

"No. Carlos Smith told me that Ribaut, with his son and a strange Mexican, left the D-Bar-D early one morning, coming this way. Who saw him after that nobody has yet come to tell us."

"Reckon he could've wandered into Satan Land an' ended up there?"

"How? He knew this country well. He had no reason to leave the main trail. He was my political opponent but still he was sure of a personal welcome here. Why should he have taken that back trail? Anyway, vaqueros of Smith's were working along that edge of Satan Land. He didn't go that far east."

"Oh, but he did!" said Ware very softly, watching Capen's white face with hawklike intensity. "He didn't come the main trail. He come along the edge o' Satan Land."

For an instant there was utter silence in the big, shadowy room. Then Capen laughed, a thin, high sound that set Ware's tense nerves on edge.

"My boy, when you are as old and as —experienced as I—you won't jump to conclusions so quickly. I tell you that Ribaut did not go by that trail or in that direction!"

"Well, maybe I'm misled," Ware conceded with indecision in his tone. "But there's buckboard tracks along there an' I figured they must be Ribaut's. Thought maybe he'd strayed out into that sand an' never got out."

"Cartwheel ruts, you doubtless saw," said Capen tolerantly. "The Mexicans from Rancheria come across and go around the end of Satan Land to the salt beds. Have from time immemorial. No, you're jumping at conclusions. But you *are* trying to solve the mystery."

"Well, sir, she's thisaway," Ware told him. "When I hit Los Alamos tomorrow, there'll maybe be orders for me to look into this business. They tell me the two fellas from Los Alamos went back without findin' track o' Ribaut. So I might's well find out all I can an' be that much ahead if I do have to hunt Ribaut."

Booted heels sounded suddenly in the hall, a big dark-faced man came rushing into the room.

"Listen, Capen!" he cried. "Them devils Bingham an' Whiskers Logan are snoopin' around Monument Rock an' we better git the—"

Capen rose flashingly and, though Ware saw no gesture, the flood of nervous speech was stopped short.

"If they bother those cattle, after our warning," Capen said slowly, "I'll run them out of the country. So long as they were working for Miss Ribaut—or pretending to—I let them go and come as they pleased on my range. But this present trip of theirs begins to seem very queer to me. I've lost too much stock over the line to be charitable. Yes! Get the boys and warn those

killers to leave the Open A at once. But, Jim! No shooting! Don't let them provoke you into it!"

"Yes, sir," stammered the big man. He looked hard at Ware, half-concealed in the big chair, whirled and went clumping out.

Capen stood motionless for a minute, then went quickly after. "And Jim!" he called. "Wait a moment. Three men should be—"

He left the sentence unfinished and went through the door. Ware heard the murmur of his voice, but he was far too cautious to try overhearing the conversation. Instead, he sat with racing thoughts.

Funny, he said inwardly. *Friend Jim wasn't mad when he came in to tell about the trackers snoopin' around some'r's. He was scared! An' if 't was rustlin' that was in his mind, he wouldn't never've been scared. He'd have been pinin' to bend a .45 bullet around somebody. The House o' Whisperin' Shadows. Hmm! Ain't whispered nothin' to me yet, except that maybe this ain't goin' to be too damn healthy.*

"Dinner is ready!" said Capen, who had reached the door soundlessly. "I do hope nothing comes of this business! It has been quite a while since we've had to fight off rustlers, though when first I came to the Open A such wars were of weekly occurrence."

Ware followed without reply to the low-ceilinged dining-room, where a long table gleamed white with snowiest of linen and was set with cut glass and fine china and silver. Two young Chinese in white jackets were standing behind chairs. Capen bowed Ware to one and then sat down at the table's head. He spoke in a strange tongue to the boy behind him and the Chinese bowed and pattered off, to return a moment later and make some report in the same tongue. Capen's face seemed to wear a trace of relief.

"You're missing your cocktail," he said genially to Ware. "It is of my own concoction, an improvement upon one I learned to make in Paris, years ago."

"Don't drink!" grunted Ware.

The sixth sense was strong in him now; he obeyed it blindly. Never in his life had he known, so strongly, the feel of deadly danger all around him. Nor was it the plain sort, against which a man might jerk his gun and make a flaming stand. This was like a snake's strike from the dark.

A shadow of displeasure—of defeat—showed for a flash in Capen's face. But he smiled courteously in almost the same moment. They ate silently, save for an occasional polite remark of Capen's. Once or twice, looking up quickly, Ware found his host's eyes upon him. And in one sort of reading Ware was skilled—the reading of men's faces. Capen was contemptuous of him; he felt that beyond the shadow of a doubt. It was plain in the sardonic lifting of the man's lip-corners; in the drooping of full lids over great black eyes. And in Ware it waked a dull resentment; waked, also, determination to throw a bomb into Capen's supercilious calm.

Capen spoke to the Chinese again in the same harsh-sounding language. The boy nodded blankly, went over to a sideboard and took up the great silver platter upon which a silver-and-porcelain coffee service sat. As he carried this out the door, Ware thought that he saw fine steam rising from the nozzle of the coffeepot. Why, he wondered swiftly, should the coffee be taken out, when, ready for serving, it had been in the room?

Presently the boy came back with it and brought it to the table. He poured a cup and Ware lifted his hand with a small smile.

"None for me, thanks!"

Capen stared. There was no doubting his barely suppressed anger, now.

"You are quite a temperate young man."

"Coffee's no good for a Ranger!" Ware told him solemnly. "Coffee an' liquor an' cigarettes—they're all bad. Lots o' Rangers don't use ary one o' the three. I do smoke."

He fitted action to the words and blew rings while Capen toyed with his eggshell cup. A faint drowsiness rose in Ware. Not overpowering, but apparent. And an idea came; he let himself relax a little more with passing minutes, let his eyelids drop. Suddenly he straightened and grinned ruefully at Capen.

"Man, but I'm tired!" he cried. "Never knowed it till just now. But I been ridin' right steady for a week an' sleepin' hard. If yuh don't mind, I reckon I would like to hit the blankets."

"Surely," smiled Capen, courteous again. "Your bedroll won't be necessary tonight. Juan, here, will show you to a bedroom."

Having turned back the covers of an immaculate bed, the Chinese boy looked furtively at Ware, who was already pulling off his boots. A sly grin crept over the yellow face.

"I believe that you will sleep soundly here, señor," he said in Spanish.

Ware grunted wordlessly and went on undressing. The boy went out and closed the door; his footsteps padded away down the hall. But Ware had ears like a wolf; he knew when the boy returned quietly to listen, perhaps to look through the keyhole of the heavy door. So he blew out the lamp and dropped audibly upon the bed; began to breathe deeply, slowly. And as he lay there, he grinned.

Like every other room Ware had seen in the house, the bedroom was decorated with odds and ends, some Indian, some Spanish, others he could not identify. But the pair of moccasins hanging with a shield on one wall he had seen and planned to use as he came into the room in the wake of the Chinese boy.

He lay listening to such sounds of the establishment as came to him through the half-open window in the house-front wall. An hour passed and still he was silent, patient as an Apache, lying with arms crossed on his breast and hands upon the butts of the twin white-handled Colts.

The room was pitchy-dark; it was moonless outside. He was alert particularly against sound or movement from door or window. He was sure that nothing came from either and yet he realized suddenly that something approached his bed. His hands closed on the Colt butts. He dug in his heels and was ready for a snake-swift move. Closer and closer; louder and louder; so came the breathing. He grunted and moved a little. The sound of breathing was instantly hushed. He began to breathe audibly himself. Again he detected the sounds of movement, coming closer.

At last he barely made out a dim shape beside the bed. He watched it until he could see the head. And that head was bowing; coming down toward him.

When he had first moved, he had drawn the right-hand gun and now—

without rising, moving only his hand and arm, he flicked up the long-barreled weapon and there sounded a dull crunch. Upon him sagged with the merest suggestion of a groan a soft, limp something. He wriggled out from under it and his free hand leaped to find its throat. But whoever it was, his visitor was senseless.

One of the Chinese boys, his exploring fingers told him. And upon the bed the Chinese had dropped an odd, wavy-bladed knife. Ware left him lying on the bed and with hardly more noise than a snake he went on all fours across the room, got down those Apache moccasins, and slipped into them. Jacket and trousers next; then he was ready. How had that Chinese got in? Around the room he crawled until he found a place where a door yawned, a door that had not been detectable in the light.

He hesitated. Then shook his head. He might encounter someone out there, if he took this passage. Someone who would talk Chinese to him. So he crossed to the window and looked out. Nothing he could see in the darkness. He was about to straddle the sill when something shifted position with little creakings, as of chaps, directly below him.

The hall door, then, was his only chance. He crossed to it and with infinite slowness and silence turned the knob and let it sag a little open. No trace of danger here, but he slid through it with extended Colt and thumb holding back the big hammer. Down the hall he went like a shadow among shadows. Around the turn and so to the living-room door. Silence in there. He flattened himself against the wall and someone went by him with soft *pad-pad* of feet. Then to the front door of the house. It was open and he edged around the facing and stood against the wall.

If there was anyone in the veranda, he could not detect their presence. So he went on out into the yard. And now sounded the slow *clop-clop* of horses' hoofs, down by the corral at which he had left Rocket. He went that way and found himself following a man who moved with not too much care against noise. Where this one had come from, Ward had no idea, but he trailed him and slid against the log wall of the corral.

Several horsemen drew to a halt within a few feet of him. That man he had followed stepped forward.

"Jim?" called Capen. "Got them?"

"Yeh," a voice answered. "On the mules. Had a hell of a time, too. Them damn mules didn't like the job o' packin'."

"Unload them, then! There's no use wasting time. Though our Ranger visitor is soundly asleep and had best not waken!"

Unload them? Ware repeated to himself. Unload Bingham and Logan? Had they been killed or captured by Capen's gunmen? What had he stumbled upon? What had been so carefully guarded from him?

"I reckon"—this, to Ware's surprise, was Carlos Smith's voice—"that when Whiskers Logan gits to sniffin' around tomorrow he's goin' to be right disappointed. But he shore had me skeered today, when I see him gittin' so close. I sent yuh word right off, I'm tellin' yuh."

"Never mind the discussion," Capen said coldly. "Are they unloaded? Jim! Send the boys back to the bunkhouse. You and I and Carlos can manage the rest."

Ware scowled uncertainly. Then these prisoners, or whatever they were, could not be the two trackers hired by the Ribauts! He moved a little nearer. And from the trail came faint, but clear, the sound of someone singing.

"What the devil!" cried Capen. "Who is that coming? Carlos! It's from your way. Who would be coming—now?"

"*Quien sabe?* I left Squintin' Mig' a mile up the trail, to ride like hell thisaway if anybody was comin'. What happened to Mig', I wonder?"

"You boys hike for the bunkhouse," snapped Capen. "Jim, you go meet whoever is coming. Carlos, you and I will have to manage this end. Remember! All of you are turned in; you're being waked!"

Men and horses moved swiftly away as Ward stood with drawn guns, undecided as to what move he had best make. Capen and Carlos Smith now came toward him, grunting as under a burden, their steps in duet so that he knew they carried some load between them. Past him they went and on around the corral; he followed and so heard the soft thud of a something being dropped within five feet of him, near a big wooden feed trough on the far side of the corral.

When they went back, he stole out and felt for the thing they had dropped; almost made a startled sound as his hand found a man's cold face. Quicker they came on the return trip; he had barely time to slide softly back against the wall of the corral. Clearer and clearer came the sound of singing from the main trail north and west of the House of Whispering Shadows. And to Ware it seemed that actually the darkness about him was a live, breathing, whispering thing. There were small noises, creakings, tiny groans, detectable all around, direction and distance indeterminable.

Again the soft thud, fainter this time, of a burden striking soft earth. One man moved—Capen, Ware thought—but only for a few steps. There was a whirring noise.

"Yes, sir!" Carlos Smith chuckled. "Ol' Whiskers's mug is goin' to be a sideshow, an' when they tell him in Los Alamos how them Ribaut mules come home wearin' busted harness, he—"

"I have told you before about talking too much!" came Capen's chill, angered voice. "I act always as if the walls had ears. You had best do the same!"

"Hell! Ain't nobody goin' to hear nothin'! If yuh doped Ware's grub an' put that Chinese killer o' yo's watchin' him with a knife, the's nobody goin' to be snoopin' tonight. An' them fellas a-comin'—likely it's just them crazy Diamon' A boys o' Steve's hittin' fer Los Alamos an' a big drunk. Ready to pack 'em down below?"

"In a moment. I'll get into the tunnel and you slide them to me. Then we can carry them into the main cellar and I'll slip back into the house so that if I have to make an appearance I can do it instantly. You'll have to stay below."

Suddenly Capen laughed, a thin, metallic sound that sent shivers crinkling up and down Ware's spine, so insane did it seem.

"'The House of Whispering Shadows'," he chuckled. "Well, if ghosts can wander about, then there is reason for whispers coming from the shadows here! Ribaut and the brat will find old acquaintances among the shadows."

"Like hell I'll stay below!" snarled

Carlos Smith shakily. "Nah! I'm comin' right at yo' coattails or a li'l ahead! Not for me, stayin' down there with that gang o' yo's, Capen, an' I don't give a damn what yuh say about it!"

"All right! All right!" Capen's voice was muffled now. "Push the bodies down. The boy's first."

"Glad I never done the job!" Carlos Smith mumbled, as if to himself.

"Ah, but you profited by it, my friend," Capen laughed from the tunnel mouth. "You received your mortgage and so made seven thousand-odd dollars for disposing of the buckboard and mules and keeping guilty silence. Don't try to act the innocent here, Carlos. They would hang you by the neck, if ever your part were known. Hurry with them! Listen to those hoofbeats. They have stopped!"

"Hello, the house!" came a distant voice, and Ware thrilled to it. It was Clem Tooley!

"Hurry!" snarled Capen. "*Cuerpo del diablo!* Have you lead in your boots?"

Ware stole forward, following Carlos Smith's grunting passage. Suddenly he had the sense of someone behind him and sprang sideways. He heard a panting exhalation; then something vague lunged by. A hand struck him lightly; he stumbled. The next instant, he was in a squirming pile of men in a narrow space, as end to a dive downward of four or five feet.

His Colts were still in his hands; instinctively he had clung to them. Now, as Capen snarled something, Ware fired. Fists were striking him. He wriggled out of the mass and to his knees, then began flailing around him with the long barrels. Someone cried out; there was the clucking, harsh sound of Chinese—ending in a groan as he struck at the source of that talk. Then stillness—of sound and of movement.

"Ware! Where you? Ware! Ware!" a faint call came to him.

"Here!" he answered, when he could get his breath. "By the corral feed trough. Look out yuh don't fall! Tunnel's open!"

"Hurt, son?" Clem Tooley inquired anxiously from the tunnel mouth, showing as a huge, vaguely outlined bulk above Ware. "I heard you shootin'—if 'twas you."

"It was me, all right. I got Capen an' Carlos Smith an' a Chinese down here spread out all around me. An' the two Ribauts."

"Glory be!" cried Clem Tooley. "Le' me git a light!"

Ware moved a little so that he had all his captives before him, then struck a match. Capen lay motionless beneath Carlos Smith, who was beginning to move a little, though his eyes were closed. Across Smith was that Chinese boy who had taken Capen's orders at the dinner table. He, too, seemed to be breathing, but unconscious. The bodies of the Ribauts were in a corner of the square well.

The match went out. Ware struck another and this time inspected Capen more carefully. He was dead, killed by that one shot Ware had fired. And behind Ware was a dark passageway. An idea came to Ware, who could look with grim calm upon Capen and plan ahead without worry. He caught Carlos Smith by the shoulders, having felt safe in reholstering both his guns. He dragged him backward and a few feet up the tunnel and swiftly lashed his wrists together behind him with Smith's own twisted shirt sleeve.

"A' right, son!" called Clem Tooley.

"Andy, here, he's comin' down to take this lamp. We'll see what's what down there."

A slender man dropped into the tunnel mouth and in an instant was holding up a kerosene lamp. Then Clem Tooley, moving easily despite his great bulk, joined him and whistled shrilly.

"Tie up that Chinese, will yuh?" requested Ware. "Then come on down here. I got an idee. Where's the rest o' Capen's gang?"

"In the bunkhouse!" chuckled Clem Tooley. "I gathered up a bunch o' Diamond A boys an' drifted this way just in case you got in trouble with Capen, as I figured you likely would. We was just swingin' down at the bunkhouse with Jim Millit makin' us sort o' welcome when you unlimbered your hawgleg. So I bent my gun over Jim's head —much to his su'prise, o' course—an' my boys are ringin' the bunkhouse around. Nobody'll git out o' there till Clem Tooley says so."

He straightened above the Chinese boy and came waddling up the tunnel, looking the well-pleased Buddha.

"Got Carlos up here, huh? Fine! I been layin' off to smash this Capen outfit quite a spell, now. An' when Capen announced he'd run for sheriff an' figured he'd likely be elected, I made up my mind right then not to stand for it. You come along right handy; I was goin' to come over here with a bunch an' make Capen le' me search the place. But this is heaps better. Somebody might've got killed, the other way."

Carlos Smith groaned and Ware bent swiftly to whisper in Clem Tooley's ear.

"Good idee!" cried Tooley. "Come on, Carlos, up the trail wi' you! We come to look into these here whisperin' foundations we hear tell about. Come along an' help us."

"What happened?" groaned Smith. "Somebody hit me."

"That was me," Ware informed him thoughtfully. "I was afraid yuh'd do somethin' that'd keep yuh from hangin'. Le's go. Now that Capen's confessed that Smith, here, done the Ribaut murder, there's nothin' much left to do, Tooley."

"That *I* done it!" cried Carlos Smith. "I never done no such thing. I never knowed a thing about it! I—"

"Ah, shut up!" said Ware disgustedly. "Yuh tryin' to out-talk Capen's sworn statement? Yuh goin' to git up in co't an' look him in the eye an' try to wiggle out o' it? Yuh make me tired!"

"Reckon this-here's the cellar, the big'n'," grunted Clem Tooley, striking a match.

Black space yawned all around them.

"Yeh, it's the cellar, a' right!" cried Carlos Smith. "An' that lyin', murderin' rascal, Capen, he's got a half-dozen men buried in it, too! He was goin' to put Ribaut alongside Jimmy Thornton that was cashier o' the bank in Ancho an' that Capen brought here to make him tell the combination o' the safe, so's he could rob it without makin' a noise. He shot Thornton. An' there's ol' Snake Stomper Ledoux that owned Concepcion Mine. An'—"

"Well, anyhow, we got the deadwood on *you*, Carlos," grunted Tooley. "You murdered the Ribauts to git back that money. An' bein' in Capen's gang you brought the bodies here, o' course."

"I never! Ribaut had a half-dozen ropes around Capen's neck an' he was goin' to bust him wide open come election. Capen an' Jim Millit an' Blackie Woll an' that Squintin' Mig' that works

for me, they done it. I knowed about it an' Capen gi' me my mortgage that Ribaut had on him. I hadn't paid him the money atall!"

Ware, striking matches, was groping about. Now he found a little stairway and a barred door at its head. It opened into the living-room. Tooley and Smith followed him up, the bonds having been taken from Smith's wrists.

"Si' down at the table an' write what yuh told us!" snapped Ware.

He stood over the trembling half-breed until the smeary page was done and signed. Clem Tooley witnessed it and grinned at Smith.

"I'll have the boys rope the ones you mentioned," he said genially. "T'others—well, I reckon we'll tell 'em to high-tail it out o' Los Alamos County. That way'll save heaps o' trouble, Capen bein' dead."

"Capen dead!" gasped Smith. "Why, yuh said—"

"Yuh don't never want to believe all yuh hear—an' not much yuh see," Ware advised him solemnly. "But specially nothin' much yuh hear."

"Nah," nodded Clem Tooley in agreement. "Might just be a shadder whisperin'. Come on, Ware. Le's go collect them other candidates for the cottonwood prance."

THE END

WARPAINT AND FEATHERS—*A Western Quiz*

By Eric Manders

WARFARE was an inherent part of the Plains Indians' way of life, but it was the white man who actually made a deadly fighting man of him. The white man gave him the fatal combination of horses, trade rifles, and whisky, but above all he gave him a real reason to fight—the Indian had his back to the wall, and he knew it. It was no glory-hunting foray he was in for, but a desperate, long-drawn-out fight for survival.

The ten battles listed below in the right-hand column represent about sixty years of Indian-fighting in the Old West. Your job is to match them up with the descriptive high lights given in the left-hand column. You have to count at least seven coups to pass this one. Answers on page 149.

1. Five troops under Gen. Custer annihilated by Sioux and Cheyennes. _____ Adobe Walls
2. Col. Forsythe's scouts surrounded by Cheyennes and Sioux. _____ Sand Creek
3. Three hundred "friendlies" brutally massacred by Col. Chivington. _____ Pierre's Hole
4. Two hundred Sioux wiped out in the last great Indian fight of the West. _____ Apache Pass
5. California Volunteers ambushed by Mangus Colorados's Mescaleros. _____ Beecher's Island
6. Buffalo hunters besieged by allied Comanches, Kiowas, and Cheyennes. _____ Plum Creek
7. Fremont's third expedition surprised at night by Modocs. _____ Bear Paw Mts.
8. Chief Joseph's Nez Perces surrendered to General Miles. _____ Wounded Knee
9. Comanches decisively beaten by the Texas Rangers. _____ Little Big Horn
10. Trappers' rendezvous interrupted by a skirmish with the Blackfeet. _____ Klamath Lake

TOM FITZPATRICK fought Blackfeet, HBC's, and American Fur Company men with impartial fervor and equal competence. A ZGWM original fact feature.

TRUST-BUSTIN' TRAPPER

By W. H. HUTCHINSON

HIS parents christened him Thomas Fitzpatrick when he was born in 1799, and that was his full and proper name when he landed in the New World, an Irish immigrant boy of seventeen, to seek his fortune in the West. His superior education—he could read, write, and cipher—got him a job clerking in the Indian trade around St. Louis, but like Jedediah Smith, a clerkly life was not long to his liking. Tom Fitzpatrick was one of those who answered General Ashley's Help Wanted ad for venturesome young men to go with his keelboat up the wild Missouri into the forbidden Blackfoot lands.

He was by Jed Smith's side when that fighting Methodist led a little band of Ashley's men across the backbone of the Rockies to open the door to the far western lands. He fought and trapped and learned the desperate arts of wilderness survival, first under contract to Ashley, then as a free trapper, his own master.

Now, ten years after he went to the mountains, Tom Fitzpatrick was a master of his craft, a thirty-third-degree mountain man—as daring as Kit Carson, as wily as Old Bill Williams, as savvy as Jim Bridger, and more original and enterprising than any of them. He had graduated from just a trapper to being a trapper and trader,

the only independent worth the name in the fur trade. And with the passing of the years, Tom Fitzpatrick had acquired another name, Broken Hand, when a bursting flintlock tore off the index finger of his left hand and mangled what it didn't destroy. Still, broken hand or not, he was more man than most. He proved it when he rode out of Pierre's Hole to fight the Fur Trust of John Jacob Astor for the beaver that meant his independent survival.

His gaunt frame rode easy in the high-bowed saddle, and his horse was the envy of the Nez Perces, who knew selective breeding when they saw it. His thin, serious face was as weather-beaten and seamed as a clay bank, and his eyes, beneath a mass of jet-black hair, were the color of summer sky after a thunder shower. And neither his eyes, nor his hair, reflected what he knew—that he faced extinction in the fur trade.

For eight years, Broken Hand and his fellow free trappers had fought Blackfeet and Hudsons Bay Company men for trapping rights in the lands they had opened up under General Ashley. The HBC had pulled out of the fight but the Blackfeet had remained constant—nobody liked them, not even themselves. But worse than HBC or Siksika warriors was the American Fur Company of John Jacob Astor.

For two years now, Kenneth McKenzie, "King of the Upper Missouri," had been ruthless in obeying his instructions from Pierre Chouteau, the Trust representative in St. Louis: *écraser tout opposition!* From his seat of power at Fort Union, where the Yellowstone boiled into the Missouri, McKenzie had sent American Fur Company brigades to take over the rich beaver lands west of the mountains. His hired wolverines dogged the steps of Fitzpatrick and his partisans relentlessly. Every time they set a trap in a new beaver stream, 't'warn't long afore one of them cussed varmints war floatin' his stick right beside them.

McKenzie had lured the free trappers to trade with the Trust by offering them a bonus of four hundred dollars for a season's hunt. Worse than this, he was trading guns to the Blackfeet, better guns than they had ever gotten from the HBC. Besides buttering up the Blackfeet, who didn't care who got killed by their new weapons, McKenzie was paying Jim Beckwourth, "that damned mulatto," to build a trading-post in the Crow country and keep the Crow trade for the Trust while he kept the free trappers out.

McKenzie's tactics were backed by Astor's unlimited purse, and Broken Hand Fitzpatrick was going to be all broke if he didn't cream the trade in Pierre's Hole.

Back in Pierre's Hole, west of Victor, Idaho, today, the lodges of the "friendlies"—Flatheads, and Nez Perces, Snakes and Sheep-Eaters—waited with their beaver. Camped alongside them were two Trust brigades, a hundred men under Dripps and Vanderburgh, with beaver plews of their own. Farther down the Hole were the men who trapped and traded with Fitzpatrick, and they had plenty beaver. It was the richest spot in the world in terms of glossy, well-cured pelts of prime beaver, worth six dollars apiece in St. Louis, and the prize was astronomical—a hundred and seventy packs, eighty skins to the pack. It would go to whoever got their trade goods to Pierre's Hole first. That was why Tom Fitzpatrick was riding east.

He knew that the Trust's trade goods were slanting across the face of the West from Fort Union with Lucien Fontenelle driving the stock hard, as was his custom. Fitzpatrick's goods were packing west from St. Louis under Bill Sublette, a canny hand at saving pack stock for the return trip. Dripps and Vanderburgh had sent a messenger to Fontenelle, urging him to even greater speed. Now Sublette had to be intercepted and fired with the importance of reaching Pierre's Hole first. Not even pay or friendship could prevail against the need to blow their beaver that filled the men in Pierre's Hole. The second batch of trade goods to reach the rendezvous would be sucking a dry tit.

As he rode east through the fast ripening summer, across Green River, through South Pass, down the Sweetwater and across Laramie Plains, Broken Hand looked worriedly for sign of Fontenelle, looked anxiously for the dust cloud that would mark Sublette's pack train. Where Laramie Fork joins the Platte, he found Sublette with a hundred and twenty loaded pack mules that were in fine fettle. They would stand a pushing—and that was exactly what they got, for four hundred heartbreaking, anxious miles. Broken Hand, however, could not afford to eat the mule train's dust.

He stayed with them until the pack stock reached the Sweetwater and started into the mountains. Then he cut stick for Pierre's Hole, riding his fast horse and leading another that he took from Sublette's remuda. Broken Hand wanted to tell the thirsty *hivernants* at the rendezvous that his goods were on the way, and perhaps hold his friends' trade in line even if Fontenelle got there first.

Changing horses often, traveling by night and hiding up a thicket where the horses could graze unseen by day, Broken Hand made good time. He crossed South Pass, no sign of Fontenelle before him, forged down the Sandy, and cut northwest to strike the upper reaches of Green River. He swam the Green near the mouth of Horse Creek, and plunged straight into the tangled mountain maze on an unknown short cut to Pierre's Hole. And because he was in a hurry, because everything he had was riding with Sublette's mules, Broken Hand started traveling by day for greater speed.

Following Fitzpatrick's far apart tracks, Bill Sublette exhorted the pack train against time and distance. He camped by the waters of Green River on the night of June 2, 1832, and about midnight by the stars, the horse guard raised the war cry. A swirling knot of hostiles charged down on Sublette's camp but not through it. When the miscellaneous firing died away, there were no casualties but a dozen horses had accompanied the raiders into outer darkness. Next morning, Sublette and his men cut sign and spelled out the attack.

"Big Bellies," grunted Sublette. "Gut eaters! Been visitin' the 'Rapaho and headin' back to Blackfoot kentry where they live. They got bad hearts to make a charge on a camp this size. Well, they didn't count many *coups*. Them horses was stove-up anyhow. Let's move!"

Refusing to buck Teton Pass, Sublette swung down the Snake and came into Pierre's Hole from the south. A hundred rifles welcomed him on the morning of June 8th, because he had reached the rendezvous first. Quickly he broached the kegs of alcohol and

unpacked the bales and boxes of foofaraw and fixin's. Even the American Fur Company men brought their beaver down to trade for Fitzpatrick's goods. But not even the richness of the haul could diminish the fact that Broken Hand himself had not come in!

When Broken Hand swam the Green and started traveling by day across the ranges toward the rendezvous, he knew he was taking risks of unknown terrain and Indians. Since his whole life in the mountains had been lived on the very knife edge of calculated risks, this was nothing new. He forged steadily on, riding his horses hard, and in a little mountain valley rimmed with high, jagged peaks, he bumped spang into a migrating Indian village.

Fitz recognized them for what they were: Gros Ventres of the Prairie—Big Bellies, allies of the Blackfeet. Like the Blackfeet, they were always on the prod, and they shared the simple Blackfoot philosophy that the best way to conduct trade relations with a single white man was by sudden death. The warriors wheeled their horses, stripping off gun cases and unwrapping the stout horn-backed bows.

Broken Hand grabbed his horse with the spurs and took to the high ground, trying to gain a ridge spine where he could stand them off. The Big Bellies boiled after him, and their horses were fresh. Broken Hand abandoned his led horse but the hostiles didn't take the bait. They pelted after him, gaining fast, and Broken Hand was in deep trouble.

His horse was playing out, winded, stumbling in the punishing uphill run, going on nothing but his heart. Broken Hand quit him on a dead run, and this time the pursuit halted in momentary jubilation.

Running over the rocks, looking for a place to fort, and praying for sundown to come quicker than it ought to, Broken Hand found a crevice running back under a rock ledge. It was better than nothing, and he was out of sight for the first time since the chase started. He scrooched back into the crevice, scooping a litter of sticks and refuse around its mouth, facing the heap he had just contrived with his rifle under his arm and fresh powder in the pan. The first hostile to find him would make a stranger in hell for breakfast.

The Gros Ventres boiled up the mountain on foot themselves, shouting encouragement to one another and invoking their various deities. They reminded Broken Hand of a bunch of jays pestering an owl, but when some of them literally stepped on top of his hiding-place, Broken Hand remembered not to breathe.

That was bad enough, but as the afternoon wore on, with the hostiles taking time out to smoke and make medicine and then renewing their search, Broken Hand found out that the tenant of the crevice in winters past had left it filled with bear lice and body scent. He damn near suffocated and dassn't scratch.

That night, when the hubbub died away, Broken Hand crawled out of his hole, took a bearing on the stars to give him his course—and walked into the outskirts of the Gros Ventre village. They had shifted it while he was hiding out.

A wakeful and wary dog—the Big Bellies used them for ceremonial rations, among other things—gave both him and the Indians fair warning. Broken Hand crawled back to his crevice, wondering if he had hidden his

trail in the darkness, to smell and itch another day while the Gros Ventres tried to find him, and wondered whose medicine was bad because they couldn't.

The second night, Broken Hand fetched a wide circle around the hostile village—*Fool me once, shame on you, but fool me twice, shame on me*—and headed across country for Pierre's Hole.

So far, he wasn't in bad shape; two days without food or water were not uncommon hardships. Best of all, he still had his gun and possibles. He dared not fire his gun to make meat until he was out of Gros Ventre range, and by that time, living on such roots and berries as he could snaffle, Broken Hand couldn't fire it anyway. He no longer had one.

He was swimming the turbulent Snake River, pushing his gun, powder horn, shot pouch, and possible sack on a driftwood raft, when the raft broke up and Broken Hand saved nothing but the knife in his belt. Dripping wet, chilled to the bone, and weak from hunger, Broken Hand climbed out on the bank and doggedly set his face toward the rendezvous. He was traveling rough country on a slim diet, if any, and each day his progress measured less. He wanted to quit, to lie down and rest for just a moment, but he didn't, he kept moving, tottering, stumbling, crawling, and the luck that favors the stout-hearted finally favored him.

He found the fairly fresh carcass of a buffalo pulled down by wolves and eaten out. He stripped off what meat remained on the bones and wolfed it down, then sucked what marrow was in the shattered bones, and started moving again.

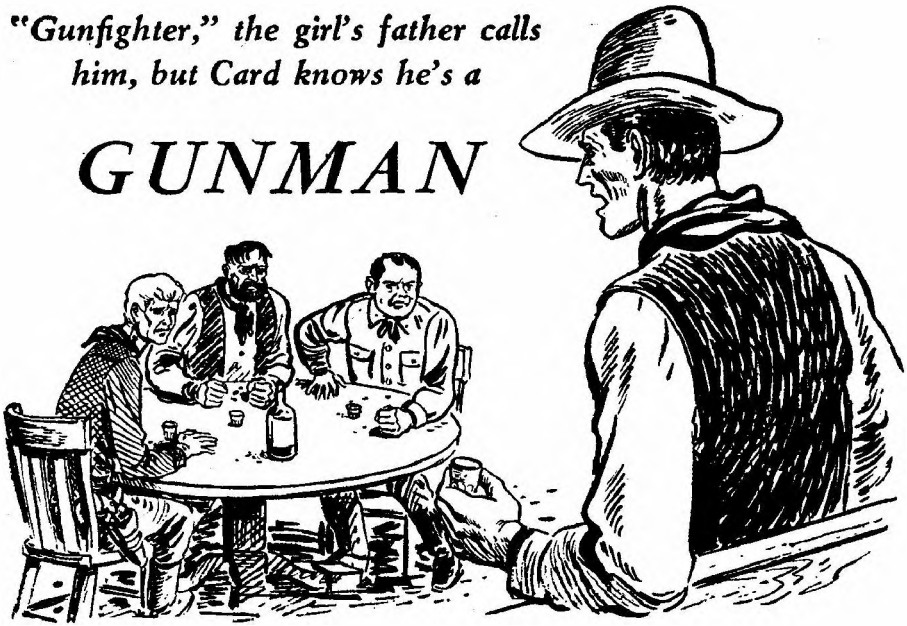
He kept on moving, counting each footstep a victory in his heart, until he came in to Pierre's Hole, like a homing pigeon battered but still instinctively able to make his haven. And the men of the mountains, friend and enemy alike, had a hard time recognizing the all but naked, emaciated, babbling wreck of a man with snow-white hair as Tom Fitzpatrick, Broken Hand himself.

But Broken Hand had his rewards. That season's trade in Pierre's Hole was the richest single haul in the history of the fur trade. And when the trade played out in later years, Thomas Fitzpatrick, called White Head after 1832, had a long and an honorable career.

He educated Fremont, the Pathfinder, in the ways of the West, and he guided General Kearny's Army in the Mexican War. Last but not least, as an Indian agent for many years, he did his best to protect the people who had fought him so bitterly from the graft and stupidity of the nation's Indian policy. He was much of a man, and he earned every name he ever bore. *Wagh!*

"Gunfighter," the girl's father calls him, but Card knows he's a

GUNMAN



A Story by L. L. Foreman

THE horse wasn't much good any more, nor the saddle. The rider, John Card, still looked like a good man, but the girl must have sensed something wrong about him.

"You saw Bob killed?" she asked. "Are you sure? Were you with him?"

Her smooth young face was so stiff, her eyes so bitter, she reminded Card of her brother the moment before his death. Such a look masked a wrenching passion. These fair, slender people owned as much violent blood as anybody.

"Were you his friend, then?" she demanded. "Wasn't there anything you could do to help him?"

"Now, Grace," her father reproved her. "Not a doubt Mr. Card did what he could for Bob."

Card said carefully, "He hired out for trouble, like the rest of us. The showdown came fast. We were all pretty busy."

Speaking of it, he saw again the Brasada riot, the hot sun on the dust, men running, dodging, faces savagely wincing against the harsh reports of exploding cartridges. And the aftermath. The pay-off and the scatter. The long riding, money dwindling with every town passed, every saloon entered. None of it was much different from the others, yet it remained as clear as though it were the only fight he had ever been in.

Was it the drinking, he wondered, that caught into the girl's perceptions? But there had been none of that, the last few days since his money ran out. No, most likely it was the vague uneasiness that folks of her kind sometimes showed in the presence of folks of his kind.

He must handle her with care. She could influence her father, for or against him. Card sized up Haverill as a man of dull instincts but sound business sense, a cattleman who made money. This was a feeder ranch, fenced and run like a farm.

Come on down, Card, was the message McHaggert had sent from Mexico. Mac had got hold of a good thing down there. Something to do with a mining syndicate that was having trouble with its neighbors. High pay for the right men. But to get there Card needed a fresh horse and a cash stake.

He and Haverill watched the girl leave the room. They heard her walk quickly through the ranch house and close a door in the rear. Haverill then brought out a bottle and two glasses, poured two small drinks, and put the bottle back.

"They were pretty close, she and her brother Bob," he said. "We heard what happened, of course, but I don't think she quite believed it till now. Didn't want to, I guess, and she just can't thank you for telling her. Gunfighters don't get thanked much anywhere, come to that, eh?"

Card liked him for that, at least. He thought of himself as a gunfighter, not a gunman. A gunman plied his trade for pay and the lust of killing. A gunfighter played his talent as an artist.

Haverill said, "We never knew where Bob went when he left. He was restless. He liked guns. Liked 'em too much. Wish I could've kept him home. Did he kill anybody over there?"

Card hesitated only an instant for the right reply. "No. He made some trade for the doctor, but didn't kill anybody."

"H'm. Well, that's all right, I guess." Haverill got up. He put the glasses away. "You'll want to rest awhile before you push on up to Wyoming, eh? Lot of Texas outfits moving there, I hear. Not a doubt you'll catch a job there. See me before you go."

It was dismissal, tempered with ordinary hospitality and a meager hint that he might expect to be set up for travel any time he was ready to leave. Card murmured casual thanks and went out to the bunkhouse. He thought it probable that Haverill's generosity would have been larger if his daughter hadn't shown such hostility. It could yet shrink smaller, under her influence.

He would have to set about winning over that girl. The necessity irritated him. But in his fix, broke, with a worn-out horse and saddle, he couldn't afford to waste a chance. It was mostly chance that had brought him to the Haverill ranch, and cold reason said he'd have to make something of it. Mac was expecting him down in Mexico.

Before he was able to make any headway he spent three days patching up his riding-gear and idling around the horse corrals. He was in what Haverill called the hospital pen, giving his horse a grooming, when Grace Haverill came down from the house.

"Mr. Card," she said hurriedly, "I—I want to beg your pardon."

Well, of all damn things, he thought, straightening up with the curry comb in one hand and the brush in the other. Then he reminded himself that women often were swayed as strongly by reactions as by their prejudices. He had forgotten to take that into account, and had stationed himself to lie in wait for her, armed with a few words calculated to take her off guard.

In the bunkhouse he had learned

that she had a sick colt in the hospital pen. Miss Grace, they said, gravely affectionate, was foolish about that skinny little colt. Dave Petersen was doing all he could for it, but the runt had made up its mind to die. Dave Petersen was foreman—range boss, they would have called him in a Texas outfit.

She wore a flowered dress today, perhaps for courage and with the intent of giving the occasion a shelter of formality. She was quite lovely, unable to control a rising color and some shyness.

As far as he could recall, Card had never before received an apology from anybody like her. To overcome his moment of confusion he briskly scraped the brush with the curry comb.

"*Por nada*," he said, from habit using the Mexican response. "What's your opinion of this horse, Miss Haverill?"

It was the question he had prepared for her, knowing that she was bound to look at the horse, see the shape it was in, and give some kind of reply that would afford him an opening for further talk. The blunt irrelevance of it now immediately struck him. Yet, glancing quickly at her, he saw that he could hardly have done better.

She was grateful to be relieved so promptly of her apology. She was glad to talk about a horse, as they all were at any time, these folks who lived on fenced range and thought forty miles was a good day's ride.

"He's been a good horse," she judged critically, running a serious inspection over it. "But ridden too much, I'm afraid."

Card put a meditative quality into his nod. Anybody could see at a glance that the brute had been over-ridden.

"You know horses," he told her, and wondered when she'd get around to noticing the improvement in her sick colt. These corn-fed folks were none too observant.

She was looking at him, not at the colt in the pen. He was considerably less than handsome, but about him hung a slightly rakish and alien air of elegance, now hard-worn. Broke and shabby as he was, he still had it, like a battered lance with scarred shaft smoothed by much use and ragged pennant faded.

When she did give her attention to the colt it was because Dave Petersen rode in and commented on it. "Little feller seems to be perking up at last, Grace," he said pleasedly. "Don't know why he went off his feed, but I'd say we've got him back on again."

"Sore spot on his jaw," Card remarked. "Parotid gland, maybe. I've been feeding him some soft mash I got the cook to fix for him. He can swallow that. You better get a vet on that jaw."

Dave Petersen was young and big, new to authority and not hard to embarrass. He flushed crimson. After clearing his throat several times he unsaddled and tended to his horse and walked up to the house alone.

Card hid a smile. The uneasy suspicion was gone from the girl, and her regret for her hostile manner was sincere now, not merely polite. There was a deep change in her eyes and voice. In all likelihood she entertained some notion that any man who took the trouble to nurse a sick animal was incapable of real sin.

The thought amused him. He had known badmen and killers who would feed a starving mongrel and go into a cold rage over an abused burro. The practice of violence was a matter of trained talent. And talent, whether for

powdersmoke or the pulpit, was trained by the head, not the heart.

He sat on the porch of the house that evening with her, ignoring Dave Petersen's obvious resentment and Haverill's disapproving glances. Because Card occupied the chair beside Grace, Petersen refused to sit anywhere. He stood on the steps, talking with Haverill.

"Fence has been cut again." Trying for a casual tone, Petersen overdid it clumsily. "Tim Simms found it this morning. Spotted it where it was mended. I rode out and looked at it. He's right. That mend isn't our work."

The tip of Haverill's cigar glowed abruptly. "Where this time?"

"Just east of the hills this side of the scarp. That gravelly piece. No tracks."

Card studied Grace Haverill by the light of the lamp in the window behind them. The yellow lamplight softened her hair, and her face, in shadow, was a pale mist, motionless. She was listening to Petersen and her father. She caught Card's long glance and moved her head slightly, self-consciously. But almost in the same instant she met his eyes again, and as she turned away he saw the pale mist of her face growing warm.

Without conscious thought from him and without regard for impossibilities, his planned intentions broke and reformed. He went on gazing at her, astounded at the ambitious impudence of the visions flooding his mind. There was this girl and this ranch; and Haverill had no son left—

The visions collapsed and left him staring into bleak recollections. He found that his fingers were knotted hard together, and he looked swiftly to see if she had noticed. She was listening again to the two men, or pretending to.

Haverill said harshly, "That's close to the old *parada*. How about those calves we put out along there?"

Petersen answered with reluctance. "Well—Tim's hunting 'em."

"He won't find 'em! Dammit, you know he won't and so does he!"

Haverill reared up out of his rocking chair as if charging to battle, and Card knew then why Petersen had edged so cautiously into the subject. The man had a blazing temper, for all his slow ways.

"Damn thieving Parrons, I'll sheriff 'em this time! I'll run 'em out the country! I'll—"

"Dad!" his daughter called.

"No evidence to go on," Petersen pointed out worriedly.

"Evidence or no, I'll swear out warrants! High time that paper-back sheriff quit stepping out of their way!" Haverill's voice blared theirs to silence. "High time somebody made up his mind for him! If I can't do it, then I'll pay my own call on the Parrons!"

"Dad!"

"Damn stock thieves and gunmen! A blight anywhere, all their breed!"

Card froze. He watched Haverill stamp into the house, watched Dave Petersen walk slowly off, and he asked Grace quietly, "Who're the Parrons? I know that name."

"Ed and Ryal Parron," she said. "They moved onto the old Bausor homestead last year, east of our line. There's another man with them that they call Sidney. They raise no stock, but they sell calves under unregistered brands and everybody knows they're never without guns. I hope Dad doesn't call on them."

Card nodded. Ed and Ryal Parron.

Second-rate gunmen, but full of tricks. Sidney he didn't know so well. Last he'd heard, Sidney was stealing sheep in New Mexico after going in with a band of stolen horses.

Stock thieves and gunmen. A blight anywhere, all their breed. And that, he guessed, included him. It was pretty hopeless to expect a fresh horse and a cash stake from Haverill, in his raging mood. The Parrons had queered that chance, blast them.

Lying in the bunkhouse in the dark, it grew easy to recall the look in Grace Haverill's eyes. It grew easy to examine plans broken and reformed. The impudent, ambitious visions came flooding back, and Card contemplated them and before he fell asleep they centered only on Grace Haverill.

While he sat splicing a worn bridle rein late next morning, Dave Petersen rode in alone after going out early with the hands. Petersen pulled up and asked stiffly, "Did Mr. Haverill start for town yet, d'you know?"

"Hours back, right after breakfast. Anything wrong?"

Petersen started to turn his horse, and stopped. "We didn't find those calves. Tim Simms went through the fence this morning and found their tracks on the Parron side."

"Not surprised, are you?"

"No. But I'm worried about Mr. Haverill. They've sold the calves somewhere, and they've gone into town. On a drunk on the money, I guess."

"How d'you know?"

"Tim saw all three of them, the Parrons and Sidney, riding toward town," Petersen said. "They wouldn't leave the place if there was stolen stock on it. They never all go in together except when they've got money."

"It's a small town. They're bound to meet. And the Old Man"—Card used the title from Texas habit—"is on the prod. So we better go in."

"Shall I go get some of the fellows?"

Card shook his head. "They might get excited." Those solemn young workers on horseback. They were the kind, big-fisted and willing, who sparked trouble and got in the way and left their names on the toll of the dear departed. "I doubt I need you, either."

"Thanks, but I happen to be foreman here!"

"Yeah, but I don't happen to work here!"

Mended bridle and reins in hand, Card went for his horse. If Haverill had got himself into a jam he'd have to favor any man who got him out of it. As he saddled up he saw Grace come out to the porch and beckon to Petersen. By the time he reached the house he knew from her face that she had got Petersen to talk.

"Please hurry!" she said.

"Sure. Come on, Petersen!"

Riding out of the yard, Petersen said, "The Parrons won't stand for anybody putting the sheriff on 'em. They've said so."

Card considered it. "How much do they have to worry about the sheriff?"

"He's scared of 'em, as long as everybody else is. But if folks would back him up he'd go after 'em. He's like that. The Parrons know it."

"Well, maybe we better hurry, at that," Card commented carelessly. He was hardly touched yet by any sense of urgency. He cared too little for Haverill. And that other sense, that blinding thing that memory evaded, still slept.

Such a quietness lay on the town, the thump of their horses' hoofs in the thick dust of the main street sounded

drum-loud. The town, a farm and cattle town, had never been wild, never known the invasion of racketing trail hands on a spree. Its half-dozen storefronts, unpainted, had taken on peacefully the grayish-tan hue of the clay soil, bright in the sun, drab in the shade.

Three horses drooped at the hitchrack of the only saloon in town, and another stood outside the shack that was the sheriff's office.

"That's the boss's horse," Petersen told Card, and they drew in alongside it.

A boy appeared at the door, shaking his head, saying his father had just left. The boy was wide-eyed from nervous excitement. His father, the sheriff, had been having a beer in the barroom, he said, and Haverill walked in and demanded the arrest of the Parrons.

"Pop tried to cool him down, but he was shoutin' mad. I heard him from here, easy. Then the Parrons an' Sidney turned up. They musta heard him too. Couldn't help. They talked soft an' tied their horses there an' went on in. After Pop came out—"

"Did he leave Haverill in there?" Petersen interrupted, and Card put in:

"Most likely he thought Haverill would follow him out like a sensible man." It wasn't right to make a boy suspect his father of cowardice. "Go on, kid."

"Pop hung round here a long time, waitin' for Mr. Haverill to come out. But he didn't. He's there yet. Then Pop said, hell, that ol' rooster's too proud to come out. Pop said he better go get some help. He just left, Pop did. You just missed him. Pop said the Parrons an' Sidney, they never said a word when they went in. They just looked at Mr. Haverill. Just looked, he said."

Card turned to cross the street. Petersen exclaimed, "Wait, now! Let's figure this out."

Card paused impatiently. "Figure what? The Parrons are crowded. Haverill's barked for the law and they've got to stop that. The sheriff's out of the way. Time he gets back they'll have Haverill gunned and a self-defense case rigged. It's all they can do!"

He wondered, watching Petersen stalk on to the saloon, why he couldn't simply stand back and let him and Haverill make their mistakes and pay for them. It would be so easy to wait for the crash of the Parrons' gunfire, and then ride back to the ranch. And stay there. Better than joining Mac down in Mexico.

His high boot heels puffed the dust of the street. He walked across and entered the barroom. He didn't yet know why, in reason. An urgent and eager thrust steered him dominantly, requiring no reason.

It was low-roofed and the squatty half-curtained windows filtered the daylight down to a cool gloom. There was the dark and dully shining length of the bar backed with milky mirrors, and the chipped tables, chairs, bare floor, and the familiar blend of strong odors. He walked past Haverill and Petersen without looking at them.

Haverill, seated, sent him an uncertain nod. He wasn't drinking and he sat straight and unrelaxed like a man in court waiting to hear his name called. His face now reflected more hard strain than temper. Petersen had stopped at his boss's table, but remained standing.

At the bar Card said, "Whisky." When he got it he remembered that he couldn't pay for it. He drew his hand from his pocket, empty, and was aware

of the bartender's sharp regard. He drank the whisky and motioned for another. Then he turned and glanced around, as any man might in a strange barroom after his eyes got adjusted to the low light.

The Parrons and Sidney occupied a table in the corner nearest the windows. They had their eyes on him.

He nodded across to them. "Hi."

"Hi," they said.

They were trying to figure out the set-up between him and Haverill. They were puzzled, Sidney especially. In the Brasada trouble Sidney had hired out to the other side for a while, long enough to look the horses over and make off with the pick of them during the final confusion. He was a smiling, talkative thief, gaunt and fair as a Swede settler. Card, seeing that fight again, swallowed his second drink and tapped the glass on the bar.

The bartender held onto the bottle. "Four bits a shot."

At his table Haverill said, "That's on me, Frank."

The eyes of the three men in the corner shuttled back and forth. As Card picked up his third drink, Sidney remarked loudly to the Parrons:

"Y'know, I ain't been round so much I can't learn something new. But this beats me!" He put his elbows on the table, wide apart, hands dangling over the edge. "Here's the story. The one I'm talking about, he's so thick with a certain cowman, he don't even have to pay for his drinks. An' yet he's the same jigger who—"

Card said, "Hey, feller, you make too much noise!" He leaned sidewise against the bar, the drink in his left hand.

Sidney smiled slyly. "If you don't like to hear the story, you can leave, can't you? We won't feel hurt!" He paused, waiting, and ran his light eyes over Haverill and Petersen. "It's a free country an' this is a public place. It suited us till you came in."

"I'm staying." Card gazed intently into his glass. But anywhere he looked he kept seeing a pair of bitter eyes in a stiff face that let a wrenching passion break through before it blurred over. He felt his skin grow cold and prickly.

Sidney shrugged. "All right." He glanced at Ed and Ryal Parron, one on each side of him at the table. He was the kind of untamed man who could sense danger miles off in the open, and fail to detect it ten steps away when under a roof. "As I was saying, this jigger, he's the one who—"

"Shut down!" Card said. He set his glass on the bar and looked at it a second longer. "You mouthy, Injun-robbing sheep thief! Shut down or I'll shut you!"

He chose the words deliberately and spoke them in a matter-of-fact tone, knowing that they were more than the man could take. The challenge was as intolerable as he could make it. He took note of the instant tensing of Sidney's hands, and gave his attention next to the Parrons.

The Parrons were dark men. Ed, the eldest, was generally taken to be the more dangerous of the two, but he wasn't. His black beard and fierce eyes often won him his way. Ryal, the fat one who liked pink silk shirts, didn't need tough looks. They were staring at him, in a narrow margin of indecision, not yet quite sure of their own intentions.

He said, "That includes any stock thieves and gunmen who might feel like taking up for you!"

In the brief and savage burst of gun-

fire it seemed to him that anybody could detect and wreck the pattern of their play—Ed lunging up tall and flaring tough, while fat Ryal slid from his chair shooting and Sidney staged a fast, weaving detour around the table and half around the barroom. Such a stale pattern. The man who simply stood and took his time, took that fraction of a second necessary to sight his shots and know where they went, was the master of such jumping, sliding, dancing fools. Such targets, all three of them.

He fired three times.

In the crackling silence he eyed the three men. He would remember them exactly as they looked as they fell, as they lay. He picked his glass of whisky off the bar, stared into it intently, and smiled because he was free of the bitter eyes and the stiff face. He couldn't even see the Brasada fight any more.

"Pay for three shots, Haverill," he said, and emptied the glass and walked out past Haverill and Petersen without looking at them.

Petersen caught up with him on the western road when the evening was red in the sky and dark on earth. "Pull up, will you?" Petersen asked. "She told me to come after you. So did Mr. Haverill. The sheriff won't make trouble."

He pulled up. "Tell her you couldn't find me, you damn fool!"

"But the sheriff won't—"

"Shut down! Don't you know what Sidney was going to tell?" He nudged his horse on, and called back harshly, "Bob Haverill was on the other side in that Brasada scrap. He scored me in the ribs and I went after him. I'm the gunman who got him!"

He rode on alone. There was Wyoming and the Texas outfits that had moved up there since the Spanish fever. Easy to catch a job there. A riding, working job. His own words kept repeating in his ears, an echo refusing to die: *I'm the gunman—the gunman—gunman—*

He could see them, the three men falling, lying on the floor. He could see them, and the saloon. It was all as clear as though it were the only fight he had ever been in.

At the first fork in the road he turned south. It was a tough trek ahead. He needed a fresh horse and a cash stake. But he'd make it somehow. Mac was expecting him down there in Mexico.

Answers to "Warpaint and Feathers" Quiz on page 136

1. Custer made his famous last stand at the LITTLE BIG HORN. 2. Col. Forsythe and his scouts held BEECHER'S ISLAND against Cheyennes and Sioux. 3. Chivington massacred the "friendlies," including women and children, at SAND CREEK. 4. The two hundred Sioux were wiped out at WOUNDED KNEE. 5. The California Volunteers, bound for the Union Army, were ambushed by the Mescalero Apaches at APACHE PASS. 6. The buffalo hunters successfully stood off Comanches, Kiowas, and Cheyennes at ADOBE WALLS. 7. Fremont's night camp was surprised by Modocs at KLAMATH LAKE, but Kit Carson woke up just in time. 8. Chief Joseph surrendered at BEAR PAW MTS. 9. The Texas Rangers routed the Comanches at PLUM CREEK. 10. The trappers' rendezvous at PIERRE'S HOLE was interrupted by a tussle with the Blackfeet.

PILGRIM *Johnny O'Dowd discovers that it isn't easy to find yourself a partner for a prosaic business venture when everyone has the gold fever.*

LAND OF PROMISE

By CALVIN L. BOSWELL

AT WHITE HORSE Johnny O'Dowd swung up to the crowded stage's front boot, changing places with a man grown tired of that high and swaying perch. He saw the driver take on a half-dozen sacks of gold dust for the Wells-Fargo office at Hangtown, and they were again on their way. Within an hour the six-horse team forded the American River and settled down to the long and slow climb beyond.

Near four o'clock they reached the summit and threaded past a train of thirty wagons, one of them with the words *California or Bust* scrawled along its canvas sides. Leaving these shouting and waving folk behind they wheeled on, coming to the tiny log relay station with this high country's thick red dust lifting its hazy fog behind.

Johnny watched the driver toss the reins to a whip-lean young man who, coming from the pole corral with a fresh set of horses, offered him a sulky glance.

"Emigrants comin'," said the driver. "Out of White Horse. Should be here by dusk."

The lean young man said nothing, ducking his head as he unharnessed the old team. *Something chewin' on him,* Johnny thought—and swung off the seat for his stretch with the other passengers.

The lean man, Reve Catterlin, had

been busy at the off wheeler, and as Johnny dropped down he sidestepped to avoid a movement of the horse. They struck hip and hip and Catterlin was flung to one knee. He came up full of trouble and sharp with his voice:

"Damn a man who don't look where he's jumpin'! You need the whole of these mountains to light?"

From the corner of his vision Johnny saw the passengers wheel and close in, smelling fight. He looked at the temper in Catterlin's face; he felt the spark of that man's unreasonable anger touch the tinder in him, and took a slow breath to smother it before he answered:

"It was a pure accident, and a fool thing to quarrel about."

"A pilgrim trick." Catterlin's words ran on, rough-toned and arrogant. "Maybe you need a little teachin'."

"I've said it was not a-purpose and that's enough. If it's fighting you've a mind for, come and get it."

Catterlin moved forward with his jaw muscles bunched and his arms swinging. Johnny set himself to parry and reach that sulky face with his fists —and heard a voice roll over them like summer thunder:

"Here, now! Stop that!"

Catterlin froze. Out of the relay station came the biggest blackest-bearded giant Johnny had seen in all the twenty-three years of his life. The man tramped across the dust, the tremendous torso of him moving along on a pair of legs like young pines.

"There'll be no fightin' on the land of Black Michael McFee! You hear?— If I have to knock together the two skulls of you!"

Johnny stood back, letting his muscles go lax. The echo of Black Michael's voice went rolling off through the trees and a girl ran around the station with her calico dress pulled up, her arms bared to the elbows. She was, Johnny at once observed, nearing twenty—and pretty enough to set the blood to singing in his veins.

She stopped as she saw the crowd, and she cried, "Father! What's the trouble?"

"No trouble," Black Michael rumbled. "Just two young bucks a-snortin' and a-pawin' the ground. Get back to your soap makin', Annie."

Johnny saw Catterlin's glance swing to the girl, he saw the sulky expression grow across his cheeks, and guessed the reason for it as he turned to look fully at her. She tossed her head and remembered that her skirts were still hoisted to her insteps. Confusion stained her skin with its dull pink and she let them drop, wheeling around the log station.

Black Michael said, "Reve, you get along with this hitchin'. And you—" He lowered two bullet-sharp eyes on Johnny. "Strangers are welcome here, but I'll stand for no trouble."

"Hadn't looked for trouble," Johnny answered.

Black Michael warned, "Mark me, now—" and turned to tramp into the building.

Johnny still had the red lips and the cool glance of Annie McFee in his head, and he turned with some deliberation and sauntered in the direction she had gone. He found her beneath a red-barked pine that seemed to lift its top right up to heaven. The remains of a fire made a pile of gray ashes within a rough square of granite blocks, and on these stood a tremendous iron kettle. Annie was busy with a dipper, transferring the new-made soap jelly from the kettle to small wooden tubs

for drying and storage.

Johnny came up behind her. "Now, then—this is no chore for a lady to be doing."

He took the dipper and she put her two hands on her hips and tilted her head at him, her expression most displeased.

"You're a brash young man. My father will not like it and Reve Catterlin will not like it."

He grinned at her, his teeth cutting a white trail across his sun-darkened face. "You're spoken for, no doubt, by the sulky one."

"'Tis none of your business," she retorted.

"He ordered you around," Johnny went on imperturbably. "I can see. It goes against the stubborn Irish in you."

Laughter began to dance in her lupine-blue eyes. It bubbled up like fresh spring water and she tossed her dark head.

"You see too much. And you've missed the stage, which is leaving."

Johnny heard the lifting voice of the driver, he heard the whip sing out and saw the coach rock past the station with the dust fanning out behind.

"No matter," he said. "There will be a train of emigrants along presently, and I can travel with them in the morning."

Her smile faded, her face became serious. "'Tis almost six years since Marshall made his discovery, and those gulches are about played out. Why do they still come?"

"It's a great land," said Johnny. "A good land. People have got to move to make it grow."

"They're all so hopeful, and there'll be regret for many. There's not gold for everyone."

"All the wealth is not in yellow metal. Some will stay and till the soil, and one day there will be cities and farms."

"Do you want land or gold?"

Johnny looked straight at her. "Why," he said, "I want what I want—and it may be neither."

Out yonder a shout lifted, that sound lost in Black Michael's gargantuan bellow: "Bring your wagons right in! Reve! Get around here and direct these folk into camp!"

Reve Catterlin came from the log stable. He swung his head and showed a jealousy-stiffened glance, and Johnny knew he had been watching them. The train began to roll in—broad-wheeled Conestogas and Pittsburghs, ox-drawn and scarred by travel and weather.

Johnny helped clean the big iron kettle and they carried the small wooden tubs of soap jelly to a storehouse hard by the stage station. There was a bunk here, and Johnny rolled his eyes at it and Annie laughed.

"'Tis Reve's," she said, "if it's sleeping there you had in mind."

Johnny said ruefully, "Not me. I'd likely find a snake in it somewhere."

Annie went in the house then, and Johnny strolled down to where Black Michael and Reve Catterlin were directing the emigrants to their camping-places under the big pines that dotted the compound. He listened to the harking and the calling, looking upon faces roughened with six months of toil and hardship and now alight with visions of the rainbow's end just ahead. As fast as the wagons drew up men unyoked the gaunt oxen while the women got busy with the supper fires. The woods were quickly full of children, their treble cries shrill to the ear.

By now the sun was gone somewhere behind the trees; a slow wind scrubbed through the pines and the smell of wood smoke and coffee and cooking food was a most wonderful thing. A bearded emigrant with brick-red cheekbones took off his flat black hat and wiped his forehead on his undershirt sleeve.

He said, "Well, we're near there. Another day over these mountains and we'll be in Hangtown. They tell me the gulches down that way are fairly crawlin' with gold."

"There's gold to be had," said Johnny, "if a man looks and he's lucky and he works."

"You seen Hangtown? What's it like?"

"I've not been there. I was on the stage that passed you at the summit. Had some trouble and missed my ride."

"You'll eat with us. We've plenty. Killed a deer down on the American."

"That I will," Johnny agreed. "And I'm mighty obliged."

He ate with this family whose name, he discovered, was Farnsworth, she a tired young woman with a spindly and fretful little girl. Afterward, they sat around with the orange flare of the campfires staining faces and wagon sheets, their voices solemn and quiet.

He saw expectancy on those faces, he saw the lifting of glances and heard the hope as they spoke of tomorrow. Annie's words came to him: *There'll be regret for many*—and it struck him that their disappointment would be better borne if there was a moment of laughter and song to look back upon.

He sprang to his feet, making a tall and lank and smiling shape in the firelight. "You've not danced since you left your homes and it's time you had some fun. Anybody got a fiddle?"

Several of the folk pointed to a moon-faced fellow in soiled buckskins.

"I reckon she's still in my wagon," he drawled, "if her strings ain't busted."

He rummaged in his gear and came out with the fiddle. He twisted the tuning pegs, he tucked her under his chin and hit her a lick, and Johnny saw pure longing come into those tired faces.

Someone shouted, "Tom Gilson's got a gee-tar!" and that short and stout young man presently strolled into the firelight a-humming and a-strumming. They beat up a lively tune and people began to smile and tap the earth as the music got into their bones and into their feet.

Johnny cried out, "Who can call a square dance?" and one man stepped up.

Couples formed; the music picked up and folks swung in and out and roundabout. Johnny saw Black Michael come over, he saw Annie, looking pretty enough to be kissed. Fiddle and guitar slid into a reel and he caught her round the waist, she laughing and going along with him as light as a bit of milkweed down.

He brought her back with the reel played through and observed Reve Catterlin standing against a tree, too heavy-footed for dancing and watching them with a wicked expression on his cheeks. Annie looked out over the crowd through the haze of dust kicked up by scuffing feet, she saw her father stomping out a dance with the wife of an emigrant.

She said, "I do believe he's enjoying himself. 'Tis the first real pleasure he's had since Mother died, and I must thank you, Johnny O'Dowd."

"It's good to see people laugh. Joy is a wonderful thing."

"They will be gone in the morning," she said—adding after a thoughtful moment, "And so will you."

"I have thought of that. I'll not be leaving."

She lifted her blue eyes to him. "What will you do? There is only the relay station and Reve is help enough. You won't find gold on these mountain slopes; it's in the gulches and the river bottoms."

"We'll see," he said. "Maybe I've got me an idea."

The music ended and her father came up, flushed from dancing and looking mighty pleased. That look faded as he saw Reve Catterlin's sulky shape against the yonder tree.

He said at once, "You'd better go make up to Reve, girl. He's actin' like a scolded dog."

"He'll not manage my life. I'm not married to him, and maybe I don't intend to be." And with this she turned up toward the house.

Black Michael lowered his gaze at Johnny and said straight out, "I've got to thank you for bringin' pleasure to these folk. Maybe I'll not thank you for bringin' trouble, too."

He tramped after his daughter, Catterlin going along with him and swinging once to look at Johnny with the sharpest of glances.

Johnny spent the night on fresh-cut cedar boughs, rolled in a blanket borrowed from the emigrant, Farnsworth. He awoke to a morning turned sharp with the smell of early fall and ate his breakfast with the Farnsworth family, afterward helping yoke up the oxen. At seven he watched the last wagon of the train disappear around a bend in the road, and turned as a shadow darkened the earth beside him.

"You've not left," said Black Michael, and there was no welcome in his voice.

Johnny lifted a thumb across the road to the level land beyond. "I had a mind to claim that. Is it open?"

"It's open and it's free. But I'll not have trouble betwixt you and Reve."

"If trouble comes others will start it," said Johnny. "I'll not ask for it."

That morning he walked off his claim and built his rock cairns at the corners, afterward borrowing ax and saw and maul and wedges from Black Michael. He squared off a forty-foot area and began to clear it, his ax making bell-clean sounds in the mountain air.

At one o'clock the stage came by, going east. The same driver he'd ridden with held the ribbons and he tossed down Johnny's leather trunk and blanket roll.

"You can wait for the return trip or you can walk to Hangtown," he said tartly. "Man's got to be aboard when we pull out of these stops or he's left behind."

Johnny took his trunk and blanket roll across the road. He laid out a smaller square and went off into the forest and cut slim, straight trees, bringing them back until he had a pile. At sundown Annie came over.

"I do declare, you're not a-man to let grass grow beneath your feet. What's the big cleared space for?"

"Folk like something besides dust to dance on," said Johnny. "I'll lay puncheons there, and later throw up walls and build me a real dance pavilion like they have back east."

"Dancing will bring you no money. You've got to make a living."

"I had in mind opening a store."

"But what will you sell—and where

will you get your customers?"

"I'll trade with the emigrants," he said. "Things they don't need for things they do. Shovels and pans and rockers and mining supplies in exchange for furniture and household goods which I'll sell down in the settlements. First I'll have a dance to get 'em in a swapping mood, then I'll take 'em in my store and talk business."

By the week's end Johnny had the walls of his little store building laid up and the split cedar shake roof on. Two more emigrant trains rolled through while he was doing this, and each layover night saw a dance, the dust of stomping and shuffling feet and the sound of gay laughter rolling up through the trees.

Johnny danced with Annie; he looked upon the warm loveliness of her and listened to her soft voice like a man bewitched, forgetting the rest of these people—forgetting, even, Reve Catterlin, always near by with the devil shining out of his eyes.

With the store building complete, Johnny scouted the woods for straight-grained trees. He cut them and split them for puncheons, dressing down the split surfaces and laying them in his forty-foot clearing. Black Michael came over and had his look and Johnny said:

"The store's ready for stock and I'm about ready for business. How do you like her?"

Black Michael snorted. "'Tis a daft and blather-brained idea. Them emigrants are too anxious to get to the mines to have a mind for tradin'."

He swung away and Johnny turned back to his work, all the lightness in him suddenly gone. Annie stopped by and said, "Father's muttering about you being daft. What happened?"

Johnny waved at the nearly finished puncheon floor, the little log building. "I'd kind of thought when he saw it take shape he'd approve. Sort of had him in mind for a partner—him buying the stock and me doing the tradin'. I hadn't asked outright, but I could see by the look and the talk of him that it was no use."

"What will you do?"

He thought about it and frowned, then he glanced into the clear eyes of her and a slow smile came. "I guess a man shouldn't get beat down looking at you," he murmured. "I'll find me a way. You'll see."

He had the floor done next afternoon, in time for the arrival of a train from Ohio. There was a fiddler in this crowd, and one young lady who had brought along a small reed organ. They held their dance that night in the guttering flare of pitch-pine torches tied to poles at the corners and sides of his puncheon floor, men and women losing their weariness from the long months of travel and forgetting their hardships as the voice of violin and reed organ swelled into the night.

Johnny danced twice with Annie and then left her talking to a motherly-looking woman over a recipe for choke-cherry jell. He scouted about, dropping a word here and a word there until he found what he was looking for—a man with the look of a trader on him and the words of a trader in his mouth.

"You've not come to dig in the ground for gold," said Johnny. "That's plain to see."

The man, Barrow by name, nodded. "You're smart. I had a store in mind, if I find me a location."

"I've got the store and I've got the location."

"Where?"

"Right here. All I need is the stock. I'd be willing to take on a full partner in exchange for it."

The man looked critically at the empty store building and raked slow fingers through his chestnut beard. "I'd have to think on it some."

"That's an easy way of saying no."

Barrow gave him a straight look. "A man gets an idea," he said, "he usually wants to argue how good it is if somebody don't like it. I've got no taste for arguments nor for a store where there's no people to buy, and that's a fact."

The Ohio train pulled out with the rise of the morning's sun, the men walking beside the oxen and the women and children peering from the end openings of the weather-stained canvas wagon sheets. Johnny crossed the road to McFee's house and found Annie busy with a broom, her sleeves rolled up and a cloth around her head.

"I'd like to see your father. I've got use for a horse."

She ceased sweeping and looked at him, alarm touching her cheeks. "You're not—"

He shook his head and smiled gently. "No, not pulling out. It's a trip to Hangtown I had in mind. I might make a deal for stock there."

Black Michael came forth. He looked at his daughter, he looked at Johnny, and, his heavy brows pulled down. "What's this you'd be about, the two of you?"

"I'd like the lend of a horse," said Johnny.

A hail soared up from the road and they turned, seeing a half-dozen men of the Ohio train swing into the clearing, each with a rifle. Johnny noticed Reve Catterlin come out of the stable and hurry for the rear of the house—and forgot it at once as he observed the bleak looks on the faces of the Ohioans. They halted a dozen feet away and Black Michael said:

"Well, now, what brings you here?"

Barrow, the trader, stood in the lead. He spoke to Black Michael but he kept his eyes on Johnny. "Our womenfolk are missin' things. Jewelry and such out of the wagons."

Black Michael's face took on a copper-red stain of color; indignation swelled his chest and he opened his mouth to pour it out upon the heads of these men—and saw Barrow's rough glance laid against Johnny.

"Everybody was at the dance last night," Barrow said meagerly. "We figured there was no need for guards in camp."

Johnny came off the porch and stopped in front of Barrow. "You've not said enough," he said, and his voice was tight in his throat. "Get on with it."

"You come to me lookin' for money," Barrow pointed out, "to start a store. Them baubles would bring in a right smart price down at the settlements."

"I've a mind to make you swallow those words."

The man's rifle swung at him and the morning sunlight gleamed wickedly along its barrel. "Easy, friend. Keep your fur down."

Catterlin sauntered around the log station and stood near by, his grin brilliant-hard. There was sweat and dirt on his face and bare arms from working in the stable, that dirt ending in a sharp line at his wrists above clean-washed hands. Johnny observed this, and Black Michael's hand fell heavily on his shoulder, spinning him around.

"So it's a horse you'd borrow. To sell those baubles, no doubt. What have you done with 'em?"

"I've not got them, and that's the truth."

A man said, "We're wastin' time. Let's have a look."

Johnny was ringed in, he was crowded across the road, leaving Annie standing on the porch with pure shock in her eyes. He stood by with one Ohio man holding a gun on him while the rest of them went methodically through the store building. They came out and scouted around like hounds on a scent, and presently there was a cry from the yonder side:

"Got it!"

Barrow stepped out, a buckskin sack in his fist with the dry earth clinging to it. "Found it buried at a corner of the cabin," he said, and leveled his direct and hostile stare at Johnny.

A small and thin man took the bag from Barrow's hand and emptied it out in his palm, and Johnny saw the yellow gleam of rings and such, the glitter of a few stones. The small man's head whipped up; he poured the stuff back into the bag and his gun came around, its muzzle bearing hard at Johnny.

"My wife had a brooch," he said thinly. "Been in the family as long as our line goes back. A cameo stone, with diamonds around it. Where is it?"

"I know nothing of it," said Johnny.

He was seized roughly, he was searched. The little man cursed at him. "Back home my people had a whippin'-post for thieves. Maybe the lash will loosen your tongue."

"Whip him and turn him loose and he'll steal again," Reve Catterlin spoke up. "The only sure cure for a thief is a rope."

Johnny saw the ugly thought take root and flare up in these men's eyes. Fear touched him and left him cold, and Black Michael's answer came at once:

"I've a daughter here, and there'll be no hangin' in sight or sound of her—now or never."

"You've not got the say," Barrow said bluntly. "It's a rope he needs and it's a rope he'll get; and I'd advise you not to interfere."

Johnny knew from the set of Black Michael's shoulders and from his quickened breathing that he was on the point of lowering his head and charging like an angered bull moose in the face of those rifles to keep this threatened violence from the eyes of his daughter. There would be two deaths here—and tragedy for Annie.

Time ran thin; a jay cried out from near by, that raucous sound breaking across the steady-building tension. Reve Catterlin stood lax against a tree, his arms crossed over his chest and his attention devil-bright and pleased. Johnny's sweeping, desperate glance touched him and held to him, and then swung back to the men of Ohio.

"The brooch will do me no good if I'm hung," he said suddenly. "It's hidden in the storehouse across the road."

Watching Reve Catterlin as he spoke, he saw that young man stiffen and come away from the tree, dropping his hands sharply to his sides.

Barrow said, "Be about it, then," and Johnny moved out over the road, Black Michael at his heels and Catterlin walking well behind the crowd.

Annie was still on the porch of the relay station, her stricken glance full upon them. Black Michael cried, "Get inside, girl! This is not business for a woman to be seein'!"

They went around to the log storehouse. Barrow curtly dipped his head and Johnny opened the door and entered, seeing Catterlin's disordered bunk, the slabs of bacon hanging, the crocks and jars sitting along the shelves at one side. His glance fell to the small wooden tubs of soap he and Annie had placed there; he knelt over these and a long, windy breath of pure relief escaped him. His hunch had been correct.

He came out with a tub in his hands, it filled with the congealed, drying soap mass. The stuff was disturbed at the top and an effort had been made to smooth it over. He turned it out upon the ground and cried:

"There's your brooch—and yonder stands your man, dirty from work but his clean hands branding him a thief!"

Catterlin had been edging slowly away; now he yelped like a scared hound and made a break for the trees. Barrow whipped his rifle to his shoulder and Black Michael struck it down as it exploded, the slug kicking up a gout of dust. Catterlin was gone as two more guns spoke up, and Barrow laid his angry voice against Black Michael:

"Had him dead center! If you—"

" 'Tis lucky you are there's no blood on your hands," said Black Michael. "And you'll thank me when you've had time to think on it. He's gone and he'll not come back. That's enough."

Annie had heard the shots. She came running out of the house, her face white with terror. "Johnny—!"

He put an arm around her, he drew her slim, trembling body to him. "It's done," he said gently. "Reve was the thief, figuring to blame me for it. But that brooch was valuable, and he had a greedy streak in him."

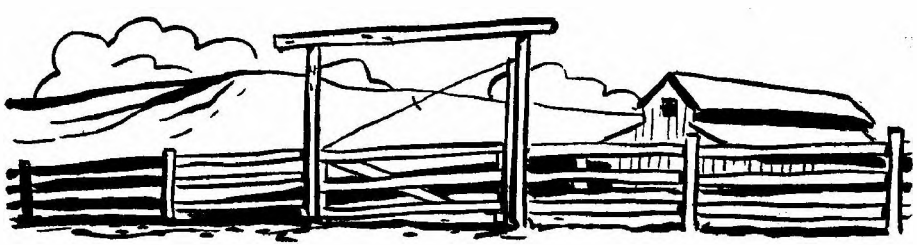
Barrow said, "I reckon the mistake is ours, and I'm sorry. How did you figure it out, him bein' the guilty one?"

"Why," said Johnny, "he headed for the storehouse when you first come up off the road. Must have had the brooch on him, and got soap on his hands hiding it. Had to wash it off, and it left his hands clean. It didn't look right with the rest of him dirty from working in the stable, and it got me to thinking."

"Mighty good thinkin'," approved Black Michael, and his smile was a wide and most friendly thing. "It strikes me that a man that sharp knows what he's about when it comes to openin' a store for trade. I guess maybe you've got a partner—if you still want one."

"Two," Annie murmured, and colored very prettily when all the men grinned at her.

It was an unseemly thing to say; but it didn't matter. Johnny was her very own for the rest of her long and happy life.



Free-for-All

ZANE GREY'S moving novel, "The Vanishing American," abridged in this issue of ZGWM, presents a picture of a disappearing people. The story was written soon after World War I, appearing in serial form in 1922. Since then conditions have changed. American Indians are not a dying race—they are increasing faster than any other group in the nation. Furthermore, they are now citizens, made such by act of Congress in 1924. They have the right to vote, in all states and Alaska. Indians have complete freedom of movement; they are not forcibly confined to reservations, which are simply areas that have been set aside by treaties and statutes for exclusive Indian ownership.

However, the Indians' problems are still serious. Many reservations are overpopulated, and while Indians may move off them if they wish, to work in industry and commerce, they all too often suffer discrimination and find it hard to make their way in the outside world. The equal treatment which is theoretically their right is lacking in practice. They are also subjected to outworn special laws such as the one which denies to Indians alone, among all Americans, the right to decide for themselves whether and how they shall use liquor.

Indians today need help in safeguarding the land resources of the reservations, in education, in health programs, in resettling outside the reservations, in the removal of job discrimination, and in the repeal of obsolete laws controlling their behavior. The Indian should be accorded the simple right to live as he wants to and to enjoy life as an equal among other Americans. The Indian's "probation period" is over—let's welcome him as a free American and see that he gets the tools he needs to use that freedom in dignity and equality—the true American way!

• L. L. Foreman's "Gunman" is a quietly told story, but one of unusual effectiveness, it seems to us. Seldom can a writer get away with an ending such as this story has, but "Gunman" is one of those exceptions that prove rules should have exceptions! There's a fine Foreman novelette on the way, too—"Sing, Desert Wind," a piece of fiction that fulfills the promise of its title.

• "Land of Promise," by Calvin L. Boswell, gives us some enjoyable moments with the gold-rush pilgrims, re-

minding us that not all was turmoil and greed, even in those hectic days.

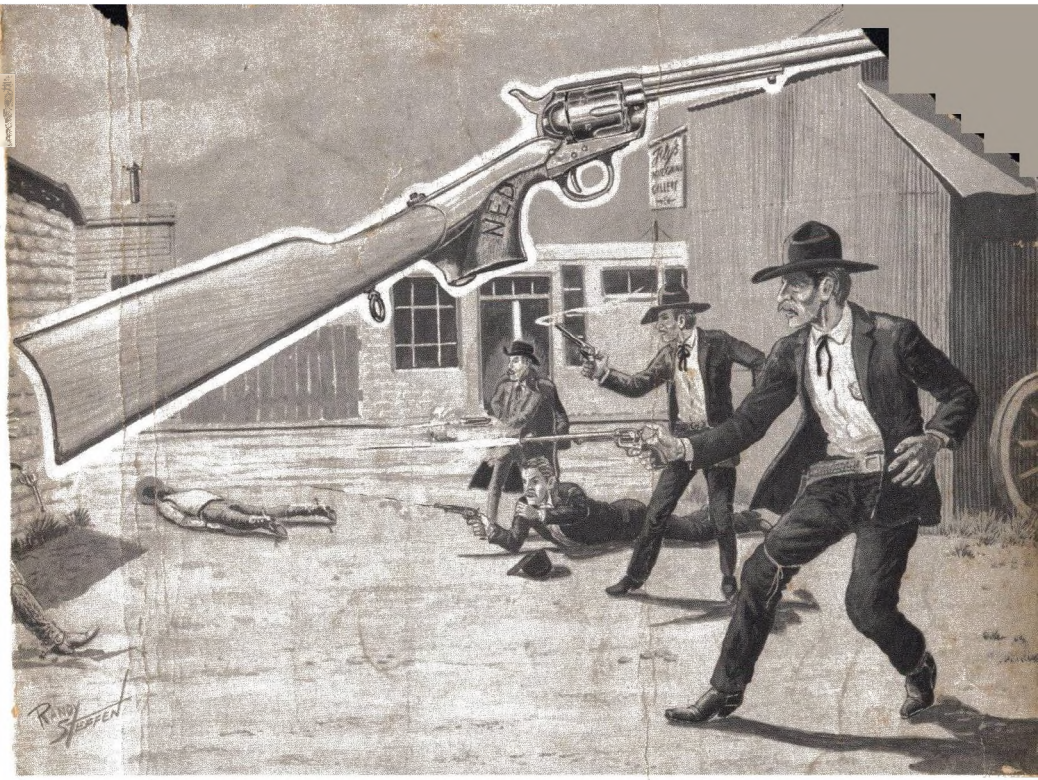
• That sinful old reprobate, T. J. McDowell, is back again with another of his "windies" in "T. J. and the Mermaid." A mermaid's certainly an unlikely visitor on the Oklahoma range, but we've had proof before that 'most anything can happen to a character like T. J. Author Clark Gray is adding a bright thread or two to the colorful tapestry of the American tall tale when he spins these T. J. yarns.

• There's been not a little contention among the admirers of the breed as to who was the greatest of the mountain men. For some, Kit Carson's name leads all the rest; for others, Jim Bridger's; Jed Smith has his adherents too. A strong contender, at least, was Tom Fitzpatrick, variously nicknamed "Broken Hand" and "White Head." W. H. Hutchinson has given us a savory mouthful or two from Fitzpatrick's eventful life in "Trust-Bustin' Trapper." Savvy though he was, ill luck dogged Fitz's footsteps much of the time. But he numbered among his accomplishments partnering with Jim Bridger and others in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and, years later, gaining recognition as the U. S. government agent for the Indians of the Upper Platte and Arkansas. He saw his share of big doin's—*Wagh!*

• Here's another outstanding addition to the growing list of great Westerns in the Dell Book pocket-edition series: "The Bandit Trail," by William MacLeod Raine, a tremendously exciting story of action and romance, hard riding and gun talk—all you could ask in a Western. Look for it on your newsstand—only 25c.

Next month's line-up of stories will be headed by Zane Grey's great novel of the buffalo hunters, "The Thundering Herd." There'll also be that L. L. Foreman novelette of the Texas rangeland, shorts by Thomas Thompson and Mark Lish, and many other top-notch features.

THE EDITORS.



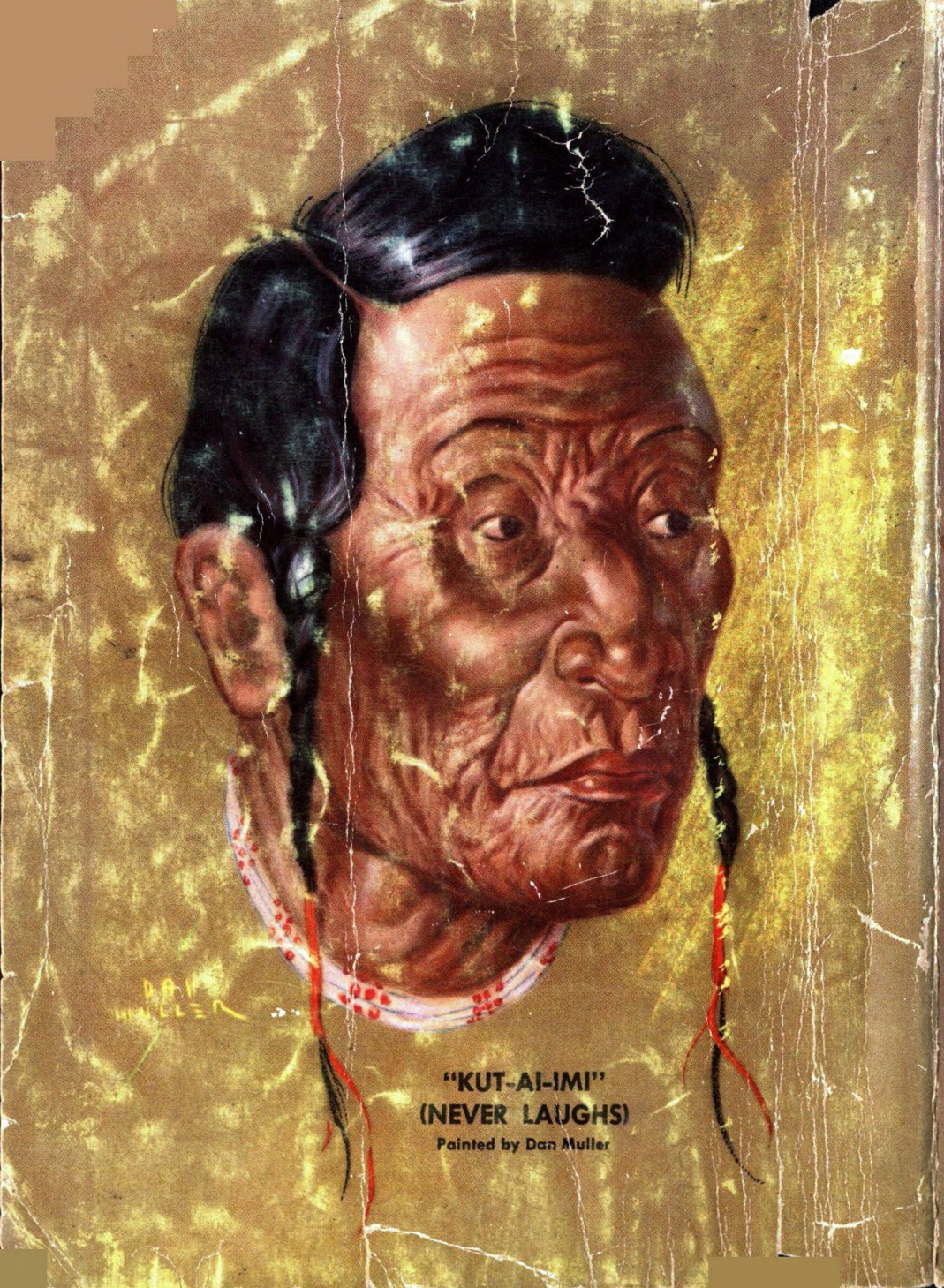
THE BUNTLINE SPECIAL

THE BUNTLINE SPECIAL was one of many custom-made belt guns turned out for some of the more exacting old-time gun toters. Named for Ned Buntline, famous writer of Wild West dime thrillers, this side arm was ordered by him for presentation to several outstanding gunmen, among them Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Bill Tilghman. Shown here in action in the famous OK Corral fight, the Buntline Special smoked in the hand of Wyatt Earp as he and his two brothers, with the aid of Doc Holliday, dealt out grim execution to the Clantons and McLowerys.

On a regulation 1873 Model Colt frame, it was equipped with a twelve-inch barrel and a demountable walnut stock held in place with a thumb screw. A buckskin thong fastened to the stock allowed it to be slung from the belt or saddle horn when not in use. The walnut grips of the Special had *Ned* carved deeply into the wood, presumably to remind the owners of the weapon's donor.

Wyatt Earp was reputed to be remarkably fast in unlimbering his Buntline Special despite its long barrel. In his hand, its bite was as venomous as its bark!

RANDY STEFFEN



"KUT-AI-IMI"
(NEVER LAUGHS)
Painted by Dan Muller

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE ★ SEPTEMBER